University of Alberta

New York Poets at Harvard:

A Critical Edition of the Early Harvard Advocate Writings of John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara (1947-1951)

by

Michael John Londry ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "New York Poets at Harvard: A Critical Edition of the Early Harvard Advocate Writings of John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara (1947-1951)" submitted by Michael John Londry in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

M.A. thesis title: New York Poets at Harvard: A Critical Edition of the Early Harvard Advocate Writings of John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara (1947-1951)

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Description of thesis: This critical edition thesis seeks to collect all the writings that were published by the poets John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara in the student-run journal The Harvard Advocate during their early careers. The writings are textually and critically annotated, and an introduction to the texts provides critical commentary as well as historical and biographical context. Two short chronologies (one primarily biographical and the other bibliographical) provide further contextualization. Two substantial interviews regarding these poets' Harvard years and early literary development--one with Ashbery and one with Koch--are printed in full as appendices.

Preface

"Juvenilia, whether written within earshot of the Harvard Yard or in Kansas City, Kansas, is likely to be just that," says William Van O'Connor in his dismissive review of The Harvard Advocate Anthology, a volume edited by Donald Hall in 1950.[1] What Van O'Connor literally says is "juvenilia are juvenilia"--but what he implies is that nearly always juvenilia are simply juvenile, are childish, are immature and therefore, somehow, of little interest. Such a negative view of authors' early writings has been remarkably widespread. Listen to Robert Chapman grudgingly introducing Jane Austen's first volume of juvenilia in 1933; more than dismissive, Chapman here seems a hair's-breadth from tossing the young Austen onto the trash heap:

> It will always be disputed whether such effusions as these ought to be published; and it may be that we have enough already of Jane Austen's early scraps. The author of the MEMOIR thought a very brief specimen sufficient. But perhaps the question is hardly worth discussion. For if such manuscripts find their way into great libraries, their publication can hardly be prevented. The only sure way to prevent it is the way of destruction, which no one dare take. (Chapman, "Preface" ix)

It is fitting that times have changed. Several valuable Harvard Advocate anthologies have been printed since Hall's 1950 collection, and large portions of Jane Austen's often fascinating juvenilia have been published in recent decades--in forms ranging from coffee-table facsimile editions to various heavily-annotated scholarly treatments.

As soon as one becomes interested in process in addition to product, one is understandably drawn to an author's early work--even if written at a very young age or if plainly immature. Almost by definition, a scholar of any author's development will need to dip back at least as far as the clearly immature work--if such is available--in order to make as full as possible an accounting of the artist's becoming. Imagine if biographers were to take a view toward lives similar to that which Van O'Connor and Chapman presume for literature. Chapters about childhood and adolescence would be very short, or never written; early events of questionable maturity--thieving, excessive drinking, extra-marital affairs--would be mostly ignored as well. This is absurd. The project of biography would be utterly compromised if one were discouraged from writing about youth and the occasional dark patch. The study of juvenilia[2]--even if the pieces are immature, even of horrendous quality--is essential to any robust understanding of literary history, literary biography, and of artistic process itself. No artist arrives in the world fully formed, fully competent. Even Mozart required several months. And exactly what happened in those months we should be dying to know.

---

[1] William Van O'Connor, "We Happy Few" Poetry 78.4 (July 1951): 241-242.

Studying the early work of artists is of course especially interesting when they have eventually matured into genuinely significant and innovative figures. Such is the case with the poets John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara, who have often been gathered by critics under the term "New York School of Poets." Whether or not one accepts this sometimes contested label, these three poets--individually and together--are among the most prominent American poets in the latter half of the twentieth century. While Kenneth Koch's third Selected Poems was published by Knopf in 1994, a testament to the wide readership of his own verse, it may be that his influence as a teacher of poetry is at least as broad. For many years he has taught modern poetry as well as creative writing workshops at Columbia University, and his books on the subject have had a wide audience as well:

> Koch's impact in pedagogical circles has been lasting, profound, and salutary. He revolutionized the teaching of poetry to children (in *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* and *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?*) and then did the same with elderly nursing home residents (in *I Never Told Anybody*).
> (Lehman, "Dr. Fun" 53)

Several works on Frank O'Hara have been published recently, including Elledge's eclectic anthology of essays, Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City (1990), and Gooch's lengthy and somewhat controversial biography, A City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara (1993). O'Hara's Collected Poems has been issued in a revised paperback format, and both his life and writing seem to be receiving more attention today than ever before. Regard for John Ashbery, too, remains extremely strong. Harold Bloom--a champion of Ashbery's work for decades now--still refers to him as "our greatest living poet" (Shoptaw, back cover). And the words of John Tranter, from a 1986 issue of the Australian journal Scripsi, are as applicable today as they were ten years ago: "Ashbery's reputation at the present is immense. He is widely regarded as the finest poet at work in the English language today" (93). And the work of all three poets continues to be consistently and heavily anthologized.

---

[2] By "juvenilia" I mean not merely "childhood writings" but more generally "early work." A colleague of mine once mentioned to me that Lord Byron used the term "juvenilia" to refer to any art produced before the age of thirty.

Perhaps equally striking, the influence of the New York School among avant-garde writing in the United States (as well as elsewhere in the English-speaking world) is by now demonstrably vast: from 1939 (the year two of the youngest "second-generation" New York School poets--Tony Towle and Bill Berkson--were born), fifty-five poets have been born whom Paul Hoover includes in his recent Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology (1994). Of those fifty-five poets, at least thirty[3] have either (1) admitted to being strongly influenced by or (2) been seriously compared to one or more of the New York School poets. If Hoover's anthology is at all representative, it would appear that over half of the most acclaimed avant-garde poets writing in the United States today have been touched by the New York School. It can be argued that the poets of the New York School now clearly rival--if not surpass--the Beats and the Black Mountain poets in the breadth of their literary influence.

Despite this extensive evidence of critical attention and literary influence, the early years of these poets--excepting those of O'Hara, treated in City Poet (1993)--have been till now only cursorily discussed. This thesis aims to facilitate and enrich understanding of the early period of these poets' development: most particularly the Harvard years, which appear to be among their most formative. I intend my title "New York Poets at Harvard" to call attention to several central issues.

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[3] My list includes the following poets, given here in approximate order of birth: Barbara Guest, James Schuyler, Kenward Elmslie, Harry Mathews, Ted Berrigan, Joseph Ceravolo, Tony Towle, Bill Berkson, Tom Clark, Charles North, Ron Padgett, Ann Lauterbach, Tom Mandel, Maureen Owen, Paul Violi, Marjorie Welish, Anne Waldman, Alice Notley, Bernadette Mayer, Andrei Codrescu, Paul Hoover, Ron Silliman, David Shapiro, David Lehman, Eileen Myles, Charles Bernstein, John Yau, Art Lange, David Trinidad, and Jim Carroll.

First, there is the obvious fact of geography. All three poets completed their undergraduate degrees in English Literature at Harvard College--and at roughly the same time--and all three poets would later come to live in New York for the majority of their post-collegiate years.

Second, the phrase "New York poets" is one that has at times been used by critics as an abbreviation of "the New York School poets" and my use of the former phrase might be taken to imply that I subscribe to the view that Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara (with possible others) form a kind of literary "school" or group. And I do in fact mean to imply that. It seems to me that the affinities and mutual influence between these three figures (and later others) are striking enough to justify referring to them as a group, even loosely justifying the term "school." Though by "school" I mean to imply no formal grouping, no official manifesto, no strict criteria for "membership," but something more akin to strong interconnections as close friends and close poetic colleagues.

Third, the title "New York Poets at Harvard" might be taken to imply a sort of merging of the first two resonances: in other words, it may be taken to imply that Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara not only form a literary grouping in retrospect, but also that--in several significant senses--at least the "seeds" of their becoming a group existed even while they were at Harvard. In other words, the title might be thought to imply that at Harvard these writers were already the "New York poets," at least embryonically so. And I do in fact mean to imply this as well. It seems to me that the affinities and mutual influences that were present between these poets during their Harvard years were key to their eventually becoming a coherent literary group, and a literary group that would understandably feel especially at home in the avant-garde art world of Manhattan.

Now, the second half of the thesis title. The first step in facilitating the study of the early development of the New York School poets is to make essential primary texts and information available in a reliable and easily-accessed form, and this is precisely the aim of the critical edition. I have chosen to collect and edit The Harvard Advocate writings of these three poets because (1) the Advocate was overwhelmingly their main venue for publication during their Harvard years; (2) the poems they published in other magazines at the time are generally much more readily available than the Advocate writings (poems by Ashbery and Koch appear in, for instance, 1940s issues of Poetry and Quarterly Review of Literature, which many university libraries carry); (3) the majority of the pieces these poets published in the Advocate have never been reprinted in any form; and (4) a (nearly) complete run of Advocate issues from the forties and early fifties seems to be available nowhere other than Harvard University Archives, and had never been microfilmed till I ordered my own copies in the summer of 1995. Put briefly, The Harvard Advocate from 1947 to 1951 contains many principal juvenilia of these three poets, important early materials that have been mostly ignored for half a century.

In addition to The Harvard Advocate texts themselves, I have added as appendices two interviews I conducted in March, 1996: one with John Ashbery and one with Kenneth Koch. (Frank O'Hara, the third poet, died in 1966.) These interviews concentrate on poetic beginnings, most especially the Harvard days. I treat these interviews somewhat as I treat the Advocate texts, as primary documents that partly speak for themselves, but which I frame, allude to, and quote from, in the introductory sections of this thesis. Since, to my knowledge, no other interviews of these poets have focussed specifically on their early years, I have thought it worthwhile to include the edited transcripts of the interviews, whole, as appendices.

In the textual notes and critical annotations to the texts, as well as in the two chronologies (one chiefly biographical and the other chiefly bibliographical), I provide a schematic contextualization that I hope will orient the reader and help make clear the role of

The Harvard Advocate writings in the early careers of these three poets. In a necessarily sketchy introduction, I provide brief critical commentary on the Advocate texts, and also attempt to provide further contextualization by giving the readers some sense of where the poets came from, how they got to Harvard, and how they met and began to influence each other at Harvard as well as in the years immediately following.

I do not pretend that this thesis provides adequate biographical or critical treatment of the early lives and literary careers of Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara.[4] Instead, I have regarded my task as in many ways archival. I am attempting to make available key texts, sources, and schemas of information that should allow the early careers of these three poets to be studied in a way they could not easily have been studied before. With my short introduction, too, I cannot hope for comprehensiveness; I can hope only to begin to excite interest in this pivotal period in the lives of these three innovative writers.

---

[4] For discussions of Frank O'Hara's early career, see especially Berkson and LeSueur, eds., Homage to Frank O'Hara; Elledge, ed., Frank O'Hara; Feldman, Frank O'Hara; Gooch, City Poet; and Perloff, Frank O'Hara. For treatments of Ashbery's early work see especially Pilling, "Secret Sorcery"; Shapiro, John Ashbery; and Shoptaw, On the Outside Looking Out. Little seems to have been written about Kenneth Koch's earliest career, but Michael Adams's article in the Dictionary of Literary Biography is a good start, and David Lehman's "Dr. Fun" makes further headway.

Acknowledgements

Without the generous help of many individuals and institutions, this thesis would not have been possible. I must first thank John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Maureen Granville-Smith (Frank O'Hara's surviving sister and executrix of his estate) for their permission to collect these poets' Harvard Advocate writings in the thesis.

In early March 1996 in New York, both John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch kindly allowed me to interview them regarding their Harvard days. Upon my return to the University of Alberta, I made transcripts of the conversations and sought to revise them into readable forms. Professors Ashbery and Koch promptly approved these revised texts for inclusion in this thesis, requesting only a very few further revisions and deletions.

John Ashbery allowed me to make use of his poetry manuscripts, résumés, and other personal materials of the John Ashbery Papers at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. When I consulted the Papers at Houghton in August 1995 and February-March 1996, they had not yet been catalogued, only sorted. From the Curator of Manuscripts, Leslie Morris, I gather that the Houghton staff began only this summer (summer 1996) to catalogue the Ashbery Papers. The reader may thus want to note that my method of referring to the Ashbery Papers in this thesis might not be in keeping with the catalogue changes that may still be underway. I have Leslie Morris, Elizabeth Fallsey, Thomas Amos, and the other staff at the Houghton to thank for their kindness during my visits. And I thank Leslie Morris for confirming that I have the permission of the Houghton Library to quote from the John Ashbery Papers in this thesis.

Kenneth Koch allowed me to make use of his poetry manuscripts, notebooks, and other personal materials kept among the Kenneth Koch Papers at the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library. When I worked with the Papers in March 1996, I was told by the curator of the collection, Rodney Phillips, that the Koch Papers had been acquired in the previous two or three months, and that I was the first scholar to make use of them. As the manuscripts were then such a recent acquisition, they were for the most part unsorted, and it was not always easy or even possible to determine which files or boxes contained materials from Koch's Harvard days. While at the Berg Collection, I found no manuscript versions of the poems that Koch published in The Harvard Advocate, but it may be that these, if extant, will come to light as the Berg's sorting gets underway. I have Rodney Phillips and Philip Milito to thank for their kindness during my visit to the Collection, and I thank Rodney Phillips for confirming that I have the Collection's permission to quote from the Koch Papers in this thesis.

I thank Maureen Granville-Smith for our correspondence and telephone exchanges, as well as for permitting me to use her brother's Harvard Advocate pieces in this thesis. Because of limited research funds I was not able to consult the O'Hara materials at the University of Storrs, Connecticut, nor was I able to consult the very substantial Frank O'Hara archive in private hands in Connecticut. The private Frank O'Hara archive apparently has considerable material that relates to Frank O'Hara's Harvard days, though much of this has already been published and masterfully annotated by Donald Allen in his posthumous editions of Frank O'Hara's writing: The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara (1971; revised 1995), Early Writing (1977), and Poems Retrieved (1977).

It appears that Harvard University Archives at Pusey Library, Harvard University, is the only institution in the world that has a (nearly) complete run of The Harvard Advocate for the years in which Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara published there as students (1947-1951).[5] I have especially to thank the Assistant Curator, Patrice Donoghue, for her kindness during my visits to the Harvard Archives in August 1995 and February-March 1996, and for her generosity in handling several queries over the telephone. The Harvard Advocate issues from the years 1947 to 1951 had never before been microfilmed, and I am grateful to Patrice Donoghue at Harvard University Archives and Carmella Napoleone at the Photographic Department of the Harvard University Library for helping to arrange that a positive microfilm copy of all issues from 1947 to 1951 be made for me. The negative microfilm copy is now kept among the holdings of the Harvard University Library. I have Patrice Donoghue to thank for confirming that I have the permission of the Harvard University Archives to quote from various materials of the Archives in my thesis.

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[5] The Harvard University Archives is missing issue Number 2 of Volume 143 (likely published in November 1950) from this period. The present Advocate house--on 21 South Street, Cambridge--has a copy of this issue, and Mr Clay Mitchell has kindly confirmed for me that no writings attributed to Ashbery, Koch, or O'Hara appear in it.

For their generous correspondence and permission to quote from their replies to my Harvard-related queries, I have to thank Henry Abelove (Harvard Class of '66), of the Department of English, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; Joe Dallett (Harvard Class of '51), of Ithaca, New York; and Donald Hall (Harvard Class of '51), of Eagle Pond Farm, Danbury, New Haven.

I have also to thank Clay Mitchell, the present Publisher of The Harvard Advocate for his assurance that I have The Harvard Advocate's permission to make use of The Harvard Advocate materials. For various sound advice I also thank Richard Fyffe, Curator of Manuscript Collections, Special Collections Library, University of Connecticut at Storrs. I am grateful to Peter Carini and Patricia Albright of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, for alerting me to the Koch materials among the Glascock Poetry Prize Archives, and for granting me permission to quote from these materials in my thesis. I thank the staff at Irving House, Cambridge, and Harvard Student Agencies, Cambridge, for their assistance. In Edmonton, the reference staff at the University of Alberta libraries and the Edmonton Public Library, Centennial Branch, were also of much help. I am also grateful to John Charles and Jeannine Green of the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta for their consistent generosity over the past several years.

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Michael Londry

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January, 1997

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Brief Chronology of the Early Careers of John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, and Kenneth Koch

1925

--1925. **Jay Kenneth Koch** is born February 27, 1925, in Cincinnati, Ohio, son of Stuart J. and Lillian Amy (née Loth) Koch. Lives most of early life in Cincinnati.

1926

--1926. **Francis Russell O'Hara** is born March 27, 1926, in Baltimore, Maryland, son of Katherine Broderick O'Hara and Russell J. O'Hara.

1927

--1927. **John Lawrence Ashbery** is born in Rochester, New York, July 28, 1927, son of Chester Frederick and Helen Lawrence Ashbery. Lives much of early life in the nearby town of Sodus, New York.

--1927. The O'Hara family moves to Grafton, Massachusetts. **Frank O'Hara** lives much of his early life in Massachusetts.

1933

--1933-40. **Frank O'Hara** attends St. John's School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Studies piano and harmony with private teachers in Worcester.

1938

--1938. **John Ashbery** begins studying painting at Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester.

1940

--1940-44. **Frank O'Hara** attends St. John's High School, Worcester.

1941

--1941. **John Ashbery** wins a local Quiz-Kid contest, then appears on the national radio program.

--1941-44. **Frank O'Hara** studies piano at the New England Conservatory, Boston.

1943

--1943-1945. **John Ashbery** spends his final two years of High School at Deerfield Academy, a preparatory school in Deerfield, Massachusetts. At Deerfield he studies Latin, French, English, Algebra, Painting, and other subjects. Takes the part of "Miss Preen" in Deerfield's production of the play "The Man Who Came to Dinner" by Moss Hart and

George Kaufman; performs the role of "Martha Brewster" in the play "Arsenic and Old Lace" by Joseph Kesselring; also works on the scenery for the school's production of "H.M.S Pinafore."

--January-April 1943 (Spring Term). **Kenneth Koch** attends the University of Cincinnati, majoring in English literature, and is awarded the Straus Poetry Prize for that year.

--June 1943-January 1946. **Kenneth Koch** is drafted into the U.S. Army. Serves as rifleman in the 96th Infantry Division, stationed mostly on islands in the Pacific.

1944

--1944-46. **Frank O'Hara** enlists in the U.S. Navy and serves as sonarman third class on the destroyer USS Nicholas. Stationed in the states of Virginia and California in the U.S., and also in the South Pacific.

1945

--1945-49. **John Ashbery** studies at Harvard University, majoring in English, with art history as a minor. Member of the Signet Society at Harvard.

1946

--Summer 1946-Spring 1948. **Kenneth Koch** studies at Harvard University, majoring in English literature.

--1946-50. **Frank O'Hara** studies at Harvard University. Majors initially in music, then changes the major to English.

1947

--1947. **The Harvard Advocate** returns to publishing after a four-year interruption. The provisional board holds a competition in the spring of 1947 to elect new board members.

--April 1947 (Vol. CXXX, No. 1) is the first issue of **The Harvard Advocate** since the war-time shutdown.

--1947-48. In the April 28, 1947 (Vol. CXXX, No. 2) issue of The Harvard Advocate, **Kenneth Koch** is listed as among the "Literary Associates" on the Advocate board. He remains so listed until the spring of 1948.

--Autumn 1947. **John Ashbery** and **Kenneth Koch** meet around this time or slightly earlier.

--1947-49. In the December 1947 (Vol. CXXXI, No.3) issue of The Harvard Advocate, **John Ashbery** is listed for the first time as among the "Literary Associates." He remains so listed until the autumn of 1949.

1948

--Spring 1948. **Kenneth Koch** is awarded the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize. His poem, or short dramatic dialogue, "Entr'acte for a Freak Show" is printed in The Harvard Advocate on this occasion.

--Spring 1948. **John Ashbery** is awarded the only Honorable Mention for the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize competition of 1948. His poem "Song from a Play" is printed in The Harvard Advocate on this occasion.

--April 1948. **Kenneth Koch** reads his poetry at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, and is there pronounced co-winner of the Kathryn Irene Glascock Memorial Poetry Prize.

--June 1948. **Kenneth Koch** graduates Cum Laude from Harvard University, A.B.

1949

--Spring 1949. **John Ashbery** and **Frank O'Hara** meet for the first time.

--1949. **John Ashbery** is elected Class Poet for the Class of '49. Completes his B.A. (Honors) degree in English Literature (with a minor in art history). Honors thesis: "The Poetic Medium of W.H. Auden." Graduates Cum Laude in spring of 1949.

--Autumn 1949. **John Ashbery** begins graduate studies at Columbia University.

1950

--1950-51. **Kenneth Koch** travels to France on a Fulbright Fellowship.

--Spring 1950. **Frank O'Hara** graduates from Harvard University with a B.A. in English Literature.

--Summer 1950. **Frank O'Hara** works as a stage apprentice at the Brattle Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

--Autumn 1950. **Frank O'Hara** begins graduate studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. One of his writing teachers at Harvard, John Ciardi, had recommended O'Hara undertake his M.A. at the U of Michigan, saying that O'Hara was sure to win the Hopwood Award, as Ciardi himself had done some years earlier.

1951

--September 1951-April 1952. **Kenneth Koch** holds a teaching assistantship at the University of California at Berkeley.

--1951. **Frank O'Hara** graduates with an M.A. in 1951. Receives the Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood Award in Creative Writing from the University of Michigan for "A Byzantine Place," his manuscript of poems, and a verse play Try! Try!, a Noh Play. The judges are Karl Shapiro, Louis Untermeyer, and Peter Viereck. O'Hara's plays Try! Try!, a Noh Play and Change Your Bedding are produced by the Poets' Theatre, of which he is a founding member. Composes the incidental music for John Ashbery's masque Everyman, which is also produced this year by the Poets' Theatre.

--Autumn 1951. **Frank O'Hara** moves into an apartment in Manhattan. Works briefly as private secretary to Cecil Beaton. Works at the front desk of the Museum of Modern Art.

--1951. **John Ashbery** graduates with an M.A. degree in English Literature from Columbia University. Thesis: "Three Novels of Henry Green."

--1951-54. **John Ashbery** works at Oxford University Press as advertising copywriter. Also writes and publishes the house organ, One Fourteen.

1952

--1952. **Frank O'Hara**'s first collection of poems, a chapbook entitled A City Winter, and Other Poems, is published (New York: Editions of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery).

--1952. **Kenneth Koch**, returned from California and France, gets to know **Frank O'Hara** well in person, though he had been familiar with O'Hara (and his writings) previously from correspondence and from O'Hara's Advocate-published work.

--1952. **John Ashbery** wins the YMHA "Discovery" prize (co-winners are Harvey Shapiro and Gary Burr).

--May 14, 1952. **John Ashbery**, **Frank O'Hara**, Barbara Guest, James Schuyler, and Larry Rivers (Chairman), conduct a panel discussion billed as "The New Poets" at The Club (a venue for public discussion on art, which was founded in New York by the Abstract Expressionists in 1949).

1953

--1953. **Kenneth Koch** graduates with an M.A. in English literature from Columbia University. His first collection of poems, a chapbook entitled Poems, is published (New York: Editions of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery).

--1953. **John Ashbery**'s first collection of poems, a chapbook entitled Turandot and Other Poems, is published (New York: Editions of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery).

--1953. Oranges, a sequence of prose poems by **Frank O'Hara**, is published by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in conjunction with an exhibition of Grace Hartigan's Oranges paintings. O'Hara resigns from the Museum of Modern Art in order to become an editorial associate of Art News, for which he writes articles and reviews.

--1953. The Artists' Theatre is founded by John Bernard Myers and Herbert Machiz in New York. The first program consists of Little Red Riding Hood by **Kenneth Koch**, Presenting Jane by **James Schuyler**, and Try! Try! by **Frank O'Hara**.

1954

--June 12, 1954. **Kenneth Koch** marries Mary Janice Elwood (died, 1981).

--1954-55. **John Ashbery** works as copywriter in the college department at McGraw-Hill, New York.

1955

--1955. **John Ashbery** is granted a Fulbright scholarship to study in France. Studies first at the University of Montpellier, then at the Sorbonne in Paris.

--1955. **Frank O'Hara** rejoins the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as a special assistant in the International Program. (Frank O'Hara remained on staff at the Museum of Modern Art until 1966, the year of his death. He was struck by a dune buggy on Fire Island, New York, on July 24, 1966, and died from complications the following day at Bayview Hospital, Mastic Beach, Long Island.)

[**A Note on Sources**: For details of O'Hara's life, the "Short Chronology" in Donald Allen's edition of The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara has been indispensable; I have drawn heavily from it. For details on Ashbery, I have made extensive use of two early typescript résumés from a file labelled "resumes" in Box 48 in the John Ashbery Papers of the Houghton Library, Harvard University. For Koch, I have drawn especially on the biographical account of his life in the Contemporary Authors CD-ROM published by Gale Research, 1996, and a questionnaire that Koch filled out in 1948 as a contestant for the Glascock Poetry Prize at Mount Holyoke College, a manuscript that is now kept in the Mount Holyoke College archives. (Koch's early life seems as yet to have received little treatment in print.) Further important sources include the following: Brad Gooch, A City Poet: the Life and Times of Frank O'Hara; Alan Feldman, Frank O'Hara; Richard Kostelanetz, The Old Poetries and the New; Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, eds., Homage to Frank O'Hara; and the biographical notes in Donald Allen and George F. Butterick, eds., The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised. I have also drawn somewhat on personal conversations with John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch. For fuller citations of the published sources, see "Works Consulted."]

Introduction

Between 1947 and 1951--from 40 Bow Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts--the student-run magazine The Harvard Advocate published six issues a year, most issues having between twenty-four and thirty-six pages, and having a strong literary emphasis. Usually several stories, a handful of book reviews, and up to half a dozen poems by students were published in each issue. Sometimes the Advocate printed literary essays by Harvard faculty or alumni, or, less frequently, by literary figures not connected to the university, such as William Carlos Williams or Stephen Spender. Occasionally there were pieces of general interest to Harvard students: for instance, one on "Athletic Problems" by William Bingham immediately follows Frank O'Hara's short fiction "Late Adventure" in the September 1950 issue; and an article on the war trials related to the Malmedy massacre immediately precedes Ashbery's poem "For a European Child" in the Commencement issue of 1949. The Advocate printed minimal artwork--usually no more than an occasional pencil sketch illustrating a story--and riddled its issues with an odd range of advertisements. There were ads for prestigious local clothing stores, and for Cambridge bookshops that would later become famous gathering places for writers: the Mandrake and the Grolier, for instance. The back inside cover of the Advocate was often an ad offering to purchase "daffy" and "moron" jokes for a dollar a piece; the front inside cover was nearly always a cigarette advertisement featuring endorsements from sports stars of the day, who assured the reader "More doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette"--a vivid reminder that the era in which these Advocate issues were published is indeed somewhat remote from our own.

Koch, Ashbery, and O'Hara would all begin their Harvard studies in this post-War period. Ashbery was too young to be drafted, but both Koch and O'Hara served in the U.S. military before entering Harvard, and thereby could take advantage of the offer guaranteed by "the G.I. Bill of Rights, passed by Congress in 1944, providing four years of college education for veterans" (Gooch 92). It would seem that the ending of the War and the granting of the G.I. Bill gave the Harvard campus a considerably different energy than it had had in previous years.

> The traditional prewar Harvard ceremony of seventeen-year-old beardless youths arriving in the Yard from select preparatory high schools in the Northeast, dressed in white bucks, unloading Vuitton bags from the backs of their convertibles, was lost in the surge of new, and often older, faces. (Gooch 95)

The arriving veterans in fact made up nearly three quarters of the Harvard student population, and generally had an uncommon "intensity and decisiveness" that was likely derived from their broader, more worldly experience in the war; "they knew what they wanted as had no other generation in the recent past" (Gooch 97).

Though Frank O'Hara was initially attracted to Harvard's music department, whose chair was then the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Walter Piston, John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch were especially keen on Harvard's literary opportunities. By the time they began their studies, Harvard already had a substantial history of poets among its alumni--Edwin Arlington Robinson, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, Conrad Aiken, and e.e. cummings to name a few--as well as several well-established poets then teaching: Delmore Schwartz and Theodore Spencer, for instance. Poets such as John Ciardi and Richard Wilbur were also instructors at Harvard, though their careers had only just begun. Both Koch and Ashbery were attracted to the literary opportunities offered by The Harvard Advocate as well, which by 1947 was just starting to publish again, after a four-year hiatus. The Advocate was not the only student periodical on campus--the Harvard Crimson provided school news, and the Harvard Lampoon provided occasional satire--but the Advocate, as Kenneth Koch says, was "the literary magazine" at Harvard at the time (Londry interview 106). And it was one that had an impressive literary past: Robinson, Stevens, Eliot, and Aiken, for instance, had all sat on the Advocate board and published much of their earliest work in the magazine.

Both Koch and Ashbery would be elected to the literary board of the Advocate soon after its reopening, and would sit at meetings with several writers who would later become prominent American authors and editors: John Hawkes and Harold Brodkey would become respected novelists; Robert Bly would publish his own poetry widely and would edit The Fifties, The Sixties, and The Seventies, literary journals aligned with the so-called "Deep Image" school, and eventually Bly would become the leading figure in the Men's Movement; Donald Hall--an intimate friend of Bly's--would go on to edit the illustrious Paris Review as well as several influential poetry series brought out by the University of Michigan, where he would teach as a professor of English for many years. In the title poem of his most recent book of poetry, The Old Life (1996), Hall recollects:

> On the *Advocate*
> in nineteen forty-eight, we argued all
> night about whether
> a poem was decent enough to print.
> John Ashbery sat
> in a chair, shelling pistachio nuts;
> Robert E. Bly wore a three-
> piece suit and a striped tie; Kenneth
> Koch was ever sarcastic. (49)[1]

The full story of the Advocate's closing in 1943 and reopening in 1947 seems unclear. Jonathan Culler says simply, "[t]he War silenced the *Advocate* for nearly four years" (Culler xxvi). It is true that during the second World War much at Harvard--and in the United States--closed or at least slowed down, in deference to various war-time preoccupations. But it may be that there were other reasons for the Advocate's shut-down. Norman Mailer, who had been on the board between 1941 and 1942, paints a picture of mismanagement and considerable drinking: the Advocate in Mailer's time published issues at wildly irregular intervals, and once threw a huge and well-liquored party for Somerset Maugham, which "doubled our debt in a single night," and which Maugham apparently never attended, having curtly declined weeks earlier (First Flowering xiii). Brad Gooch suggests something further, that a kind of homophobia informed both the shut-down and the reopening:

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[1] In his letter of 7 November 1996, Hall elaborates: "I don't think that Frank was ever at a meeting, because he was not a member. John was quiet, but everyone listened when he had an opinion. Ken was loud and bossy and forceful and talkative, sarcastic."

> Having been funded by a group of Old Guard trustees, the magazine had actually been disbanded in the early 1940s because of indications that its editorial board had turned into an exclusively homosexual club. When it was started up again in 1947 with funds from a Boston businessman, an unofficial guideline had supposedly been agreed upon banning homosexuals from the board. (Gooch 122)

Kenneth Koch suggests that it was not only homosexuals who--on the stipulations of a patron of the Advocate--were to be barred from the board, but that blacks, Jews, and heavy drinkers were to be excluded as well (Londry interview 107). The poet Donald Hall writes:

> It was common knowledge--which does not mean that it was true!--that when the Advocate went bust, at some point early in the 1940s, it was pretty drunken and pretty gay. I never heard that it was "pretty Jewish." I do know that Mailer and Nemerov were both on it approximately at that time. Well, at least they were published there. I think they were on it. There were rumours that it had been a largely gay club.
>
> In our time, it was partly gay, partly straight, with no problems between the groups. Certainly when we voted on electing new members, no issues of sexuality or ethnicity ever arose. I'm virtually certain I would remember if they had done . . . .
>
> But I do remember that the rumor was that homosexuality had something to do with the shutting down of the old Advocate before us. And I do remember one Trustee was known as an anti-Semite. I do not remember his name.
>
> (Hall, Letter to Londry, 7 November 1996)

The identity of the sponsor who supposedly donated funds with strict, exclusionary conditions has not been absolutely confirmed. The editorial in the first post-War Advocate issue (April 1947) says relatively little about the magazine's financial contributors:

> Among the many who have made the revival of the Advocate possible, its own Board of Trustees deserve first mention. The financial support of the Board as a whole, and the advice and assistance of Mr. William Bentinck-Smith in particular were absolutely indispensable. (20)

Harvard University Archives has among its holdings papers relating to the Advocate and Mr Bentinck-Smith, and it may be that some of the mystery would be cleared by examination of these papers--which are, however, currently under restricted access.[2]

Whatever "unofficial guidelines" there might have been for membership on the board in 1947, Jews and homosexuals were represented--among them, Koch and Ashbery, respectively. There were no blacks on the board at that time, though this may be attributable less to imposed policy than to statistical improbability, since, as Hall mentions, there were "few blacks in my class of a thousand" (Hall, Letter to Londry, 7 November 1996). There were, by all accounts, heavy drinkers in solid supply on the board--and thus three of the four purportedly banned minorities were in fact well represented. Whatever stipulations the Trustees or sponsors may have made, they seem not to have been taken very seriously by the board members. It seems that the Advocate did not generally see colour or origin or even content as most essential to its concerns, but rather style of expression and quality of thought, in the spirit of many literary journals that came before them: as the first post-War editorial stated, "[t]he *Advocate* is a literary magazine in the broad sense of the word which excludes no subject but only the ill-considered or badly written."

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[2] I was unable to examine these papers during my research at the Archives. It should be mentioned, however, that Donald Hall in his letter of 18 December 1996 stresses that the anti-Semitic Trustee to whom he refers "was not Bentinck-Smith."

The Poets

Kenneth Koch

The oldest of the three poets, Jay Kenneth Koch was born in 1925 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has said that he began writing poetry at the age of five, in 1930, but only became serious about it in his mid to late teens (Shapiro interview 55). Some of Koch's relatives in Cincinnati had literary interests:

> My mother, it seems to me, had literary talent. She wrote a couple of short stories, which I was not capable of judging. She was often called on to lecture in various places on books, and often she would try out these book reviews of hers on me. They were sort of like dramatisations more than criticism. And there was a family legend, of which I was never able to ascertain the truth, but it was probably true, that one of my mother's uncles, who had become quite prosperous, gave up everything in order to write a book called Her First Kiss. (Herd interview 27)

There is another anecdote of an uncle who, when Koch was fifteen, "took me down to the family business and opened a big safe and showed me some of the poems he had written when he was nineteen years old, and he gave me a big book of Shelley," whereupon the young Koch "immediately started writing poems which I thought were in the style of Shelley. I realised later that my poems weren't much like Shelley, but they had a sort of Shelleyan attitude. I was standing there in the midst of all space, time and history, evoking things, and saying thee and thou" (Herd interview 27).

When Koch was sixteen or seventeen years old, he "discovered modern American poetry and I also discovered New Directions anthologies," edited by Louis Untermeyer --"big wonderful books all full of the avant-garde writing of the time"--which included poets such as

> Paul Goodman, Delmore Schwartz, William Carlos Williams. A number of the poets had gone to Harvard. Delmore Schwartz, in fact, was teaching a course at Harvard, and I liked his work a lot. Wallace Stevens, as I remember, had gone to Harvard. T.S. Eliot had gone to Harvard. I forget who else. It seemed to me a place where poets went to school. And of course it had a reputation as a very good college. (Londry interview 103)

Before Koch entered Harvard, however, he was conscripted into the U.S. Army. While serving as an infantryman in the Pacific he held a subscription to View--a magazine published in New York by some of the Surrealists, who were among Koch's greatest admirations at the time. Koch once submitted a batch of his own poems to View, and received a rejection slip bearing the concise encouragement: "We like your poems, but go deeper into yourself. Dream" (Londry interview 105). Koch's early attempts to publish, however, bore fruit quickly enough. While still stationed in the Pacific, Koch learned that Poetry magazine--the prestigious Chicago monthly founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912--had accepted some of his work. For the November 1945 issue the editors, Peter De Vries and Marion Strobel, had taken three short poems: two sure-rhythmed descriptions of Koch's war-time experiences, and one rather surreal lyric about a pleasurable train journey, which closes with this striking image:

> It was amazing, as though you could place your hand in a ripe
> fruit and withdraw a beautiful afternoon.[3]

One of Koch's next-published pieces, and one of his earliest extant poems, "Schoolyard in April," was published in Poetry about a year and a half later, in the April 1947 issue. Here the influence of William Carlos Williams seems strong--with the very short lines, little punctuation, and the unadorned reporting of ordinary events. The first stanza, for instance, presents "little girls" who,

> unconscious of the beauty
> of their movements
> like milkweed in the wind,
> are beginning to drift
> over by the drinking fountain
> where they will skip rope

Much of the other poetry Koch wrote and published during his Harvard days is darker, denser, more complex syntactically and semantically than "Schoolyard in April." Koch has said the "Yeatsian tone" dominated his poetry while at Harvard (Londry interview 118). Generally, Yeats and Surrealism appear to be the most evident influences in the verse Koch wrote and published as an undergraduate.

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[3] Interestingly, a similar image--"Inside the pomegranate is the blue sky"--would appear several years later as the opening line of Koch's poem "Pregnancy," first published in the February 1956 issue of Poetry, and later collected in Koch's Thank You and Other Poems (1962).

The first issue of The Harvard Advocate in which Koch appeared was the May 21 issue of 1947, the third issue since the Advocate's reopening in April. This, the year's "Poetry Issue," is dominated by Kenneth Koch and John Ashbery: the issue prints four poems by Koch and three by Ashbery. The first of Koch's is a poem that prepares us for his other writings of the period, a poem that might be read as something of a poetics:

NOCTURN & AUBADE

Now, as a child, descend, descend;
You will grow as fat as cream, ---
And float to the top
With your bones undressed
By the angry limestone of dream.

Now, at the glass, pretend, pretend:
Balance your swimming face, ---
Or know, as it rocks,
How love must move
Through nakedness to grace.

In many, even most, of the poems by Koch of this period, the word "dream" figures prominently, as does the image of the mirror, the "glass." These two quatrains seem to have the message: Dream redeems, though not without pain. One ought to descend with an attitude of openness ("as a child") and through the ordeal of the descent into "dream" (the unconscious, or surreality) begin to face oneself ("at the glass"). While in front of the mirror one has two choices: one can either "pretend," try to save "face," to ignore the previously suppressed content that is now unearthed from the unconscious, and thus live a conventionally or superficially "balanced" life, or, on the other hand, one can realize that an authentic, lively life, a life of redemption (a life of "love" and "grace") must opt for the way of "nakedness," an open-eyed descent into the depths of "dream." This strategy is strongly reminiscent of Surrealism's early interpretation (or appropriation) of Freudian psychoanalysis. In his first manifesto of Surrealism, published in 1924, André Breton stresses the radically therapeutic or redemptive qualities of a "descent into dream":

> Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton 26)

Koch was reading Freud as well as Surrealism while at Harvard--he refers to the thinker more than once in the poems of the Garrison Prize MS--and by 1950 he would be undergoing analysis with a Dr Rudolph Lowenstein in New York (Rivers 275-76).

Three other poems of Koch's were published in the same issue as "Nocturn & Aubade." All four poems have their striking lines, and show an ability to surprise, as with the penultimate stanza of "In Answer to This Emptiness":

> We have arrived at creation and have swallowed the mirror:
> inside us glittering verities shine,
> reflect, are re-reflected into speech,
> are wine in the mouth, in the eyes, in the air,
>   are eyes in the wine of the mouth of the air. . . .

Yet in general the twenty-two year old Koch is writing a kind of dogged surrealism: he seems to be reaching very deliberately, very effortfully, for intricacy, seriousness, importance, and surrealistic effects.

The only other poem Koch published in The Harvard Advocate marked the occasion of his winning the Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize, which was "awarded annually by the Faculty [of Harvard] for the best poems in English submitted in a competition open to Harvard undergraduates" (Advocate May 21, 1947: 11). This poem was "Entr'acte for a Freak Show," which would later be frequently anthologized in collections of Advocate writing. At least as surrealist as Koch's four earlier Advocate poems, "Entr'acte" seems, however, a more mature, more realized achievement: it has a clarity and contextualization that is less present in the earlier four Advocate poems.

Koch prepares us well for his surrealistic imagery by providing a title that sets the scene and frames each speech. An "entr'acte" is a performance taking place between acts;

the title tells us this particular "Entr'acte" takes place at a "Freak Show": thus we are prepared for the short, odd poem that follows, populated with three strange speakers, The Man with the Iron Mouth, The Human Frog, and The Bearded Lady. The poem's rhythms are strong, though not mechanically so. The tone is mysterious and authoritative: even a cursory reading of it gives the reader the sense it may well be saying something of import. Semantically, the poem is a thorough life-questioning: the Man with the Iron Mouth refers to his own freak-show work as "miraculous"; the Frog retorts that the Man's trade is simply a "trick"; the Man then defends his livelihood as a worthwhile and liberating activity, one that aims at "Absurd perfection," and in turn criticizes both the Frog and the hypocrisy of the freak show audience ("you can remove / The vision with a smile, sane and sincere, / Clenching your fists"); the Bearded Lady then enters, challenging them both ("Gentlemen, you both lie. Confess me here / the twice tormented mirror of your dream").

Though "Entr'acte," seen beside much other undergraduate verse, is an unusually accomplished piece, it does come across as a kind of "textbook surrealism," and it and Koch's other Advocate-published poems do not point directly to his later, more mature work. If anything, Koch's later comic, conversational, and deceptively simple lyrics make these earlier attempts seem somewhat pretentious and forced. Koch has described one way that his attitude toward complexity changed soon after graduating from Harvard:

> [Frank O'Hara] was telling me about a novel called *The Circus* by Frank Scully. I was sort of a snob about literature when I met Frank; he was more sophisticated. I asked him if the novel was good, and he said "Yes. It's very quiet and modest and direct and clear and simple." I'd never thought those were good things; I'd thought novels -- literature -- had to be deep and complex to be good.
>
> My wife and I went to the theater in London to see a production of *Peter Pan*. It was a children's production, but very moving. Its simplicity, even its "dumbness," seemed an important part of what was good about it.
> (Shapiro interview 57)

It seems, too, that Koch's attitude toward seriousness was influenced substantially by his reading of the twentieth-century French poet Max Jacob:

> I was very moved by Max Jacob, particularly his prose poems in *Le Cornet à dés*. Those poems of Jacob are dream-like, lyrical, and at the same time

> very funny. From Jacob I learned the possibility of being funny and lyrical at the same time, and that meant a lot to me. (Shapiro interview 61)

Though Koch would maintain a life-long interest in surrealism, it would seem that the sort of seriousness, tending towards the ponderous, of his Advocate pieces would be something to be overcome before he could write in the comical yet lyrical way that today seems so quintessentially Kochian. Note the delightful improvisational romp one finds in lines such as these, from the opening of "In Love with You," a poem first published in Poetry magazine in 1955:

> O what a physical effect it has on me
> To dive forever into the light blue sea
> Of your acquaintance! Ah, but dearest friends,
> Like forms, are finished, as life has ends! Still,
> It is beautiful, when October
> Is over, and February is over,
> To sit in the starch of my shirt, and to dream of your sweet
> Ways! As if the world were a taxi, you enter it, then
> Reply (to no one), "Let's go five or six blocks."
> Isn't the blue stream that runs past you a translation from the Russian?
> Aren't my eyes bigger than love?
> Isn't this history, and aren't we a couple of ruins?
> Is Carthage Pompeii? is the pillow a bed? is the sun
> What glues our heads together? O midnight! O midnight!
> Is love what we are,
> Or has happiness come to me in a private car
> That's so very small I'm amazed to see it there?

Such an energetic wedding of wistful lyricism and zany humour would be a few years yet to come.

John Ashbery

The youngest of the three poets, John Lawrence Ashbery was born in 1927 in Rochester, New York, and grew up in the nearby town of Sodus on his father's fruit farm. Like Koch, Ashbery wrote poems early in life. Among Ashbery's papers at the Houghton Library are a handful of very early juvenilia, including "The Battle" ("written 8 yrs. 5 mos. -- Dec. 1935") which opens:

> The trees are bent with their glittering load,
> The bushes are covered and so is the road.
> The fairies are riding upon their snowflakes,
> And the tall haystacks are great sugar mounds.
> These are the fairies camping grounds.

Another poem from the same file, dated May 1936, is a collaboration between Ashbery and his maternal grandmother, Adelaide Lawrence. Ashbery often spent time at his grandparents' house in Rochester, where his grandfather, Henry Lawrence, was the chair of the Department of Physics at the university. Ashbery recalls that as a child

> I used to spend almost every weekend with him. He was the scholarly member of the family. He had a lot of books I liked to pore over---complete sets of Victorian novelists and poets. I was very fond of him. It's said that I look like him now, and that as a teenager I looked as he looked at the same age. (Kostelanetz interview 91)

Ashbery's life in Sodus was not always happy, however. "I had a younger brother whom I didn't get along with--we were always fighting the way kids do--and he died at the age of nine. I felt guilty because I had been so nasty to him, so that was a terrible shock" (Stitt interview 61). Neither did Ashbery get along with his father: "He was a good person, but he had a very violent temper" (Herd interview 32). Sodus was very rural and Ashbery's early interests in art and literature were shared by few. Some consolation was found in weekly art classes in Rochester, but even these excursions were coloured by a certain lack of fulfillment:

> My ambition was to be a painter, so I took weekly classes at the art museum in Rochester from the age of about eleven until fifteen or sixteen. I fell deeply in love with a girl who was in the class but who wouldn't have anything to do with me. So I went to this weekly class knowing that I

> would see this girl, and somehow this being involved with art may have something to do with my poetry. Also, . . . I lived with [my grandparents] as a small child and went to kindergarten and first grade in the city. I also loved [their] house; there were lots of kids around, and I missed all this terribly when I went back to live with my parents. Then going back there each week for art class was a returning to things I had thought were lost, and gave me a curious combination of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. (Poulin interview 32)

Ashbery's early interest in painting waned a little when he encountered modern poetry at the age of fifteen:

> I was in high school and had received a prize in a Time current events contest which was conducted in our high school. I didn't know very much about current events, but apparently I was good enough at guessing so that I won the quiz and was awarded an anthology of modern American poetry [one edited by Louis Untermeyer]. I had never really thought very much about poetry till that time. . . . For some reason that anthology of poetry made me feel competitive in a way that I had never felt when looking at pictures. Maybe because I knew I was never going to be a very good painter anyway. But it seemed to me that this form offered me a lot of possibilities that would have been unavailable to me if I was just painting one thing. A picture is a picture--it's what's there--whereas poetry is what's there and also is everything that isn't there. (Poulin interview 34)

In this Quiz-Kid period, Ashbery's parents realized "the educational limitations of his rural high school" and sent him "to a preparatory school, the Deerfield Academy, for his junior and senior years, under 'a scholarship' anonymously provided by a Sodus neighbor" (Kostelanetz 67).

It was while at Deerfield that Ashbery first had his poetry accepted for publication--initially in the high school paper, The Deerfield Scroll, and later in Poetry, though the latter publication was entirely without his consent. Many years later, in the 1987 Diamond Jubilee issue of Poetry, Ashbery would recount the story of his early truck with the famous Chicago magazine:

> My first appearance in *Poetry* in November 1945 came as a complete surprise, in fact, a shock, to me. In the spring of 1945, my last year at Deerfield Academy, I had shown some of my poems to Deerfield's poet in residence, David Morton. He was polite about them, but it seemed to me in retrospect also somewhat odd and reserved. The reason, I found out later, was that a friend and classmate of mine, also an aspiring poet, had shown Morton some of his poems and also some of mine, passing the latter off as his own. Morton had been sufficiently impressed by them to forward them to *Poetry* where unbeknownst to me two of mine were accepted. Shortly afterwards, I sent a group of my poems to *Poetry* and eventually had them

> returned with a rejection slip on which an editor had written the single word "Sorry." In November of that year, when both I and my erstwhile friend were freshmen at Harvard, I was stunned to see two of my poems in *Poetry* under another name (Joel Michael Symington), a pseudonym chosen by my friend (who is now deceased). This was doubly disturbing since I assumed that the editors of *Poetry* had supposed that I was the plagiarist and that I would be permanently blackballed from publishing there. Since *Poetry* was virtually the only outlet for poetry at the time, it seemed to me that my career as a poet had ended before it began. It was quite a few years before I was able to summon up enough courage to submit more poems to *Poetry*.[4]
> ("Comment" Poetry 151.3 [December 1987]: 203)

Even in these "Symington" poems--with their sophisticated syntax, elegance of phrasing, and resonant mysteriousness of diction--Ashbery shows strengths that would figure large in his later work. Yet the Ashbery of the "Symington" poems is not really recognizably the mature Ashbery. And in fact Ashbery would later find them "kind of embarrassing," and would be "glad they weren't published under my own name" (Kermani 70). It would not be until his Harvard years that Ashbery would write the kind of poems that he would eventually feel were worth collecting in a full-length volume. At Harvard, Ashbery experimented with a variety of styles, tones, and poetic forms, and much of this exploration is well evidenced in the numerous pieces published in the Advocate. The magazine printed thirteen pieces by Ashbery, nearly twice as many as those by O'Hara and Koch, who published seven each.

John Ashbery was well-respected by the Advocate board, both as a writer and an editor. In a contributors' note in the September 1948 issue, the editors praise Ashbery's writing: "The rhythm, balance, and general quality of these poems are, we feel, quite high indeed" (Advocate September 1948: 17). Donald Hall joined the magazine in "February or March 1948,"[5] and, in his Paris Review interview, remembers Ashbery's presence on the board vividly:

> I admired Ashbery; we *all* admired John, although in general we were not a mutual admiration society. In general we were murderous. John was at that time reticent, shy, precocious. He had published in *Poetry* while he

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[4] It was in fact not till ten years later, in December of 1955, with Henry Rago presiding as editor, that Ashbery would publish in Poetry again.

[5] Donald Hall's 7 November 1996 letter to Michael Londry.

> was still at Deerfield Academy. On the *Advocate*, we were terribly serious about the poems we published. We would stay up until two or three in the morning arguing whether a poem was good enough to be in the magazine. One time we had a half-page gap and asked John to come up with a poem. After some prodding, he conceded that *maybe* he had a poem. He went back to his room to get it, and it took him forty minutes. We didn't know it then, but of course--he later admitted--he went home and wrote the poem. In 1989 I told John this story--wondering if he remembered it as I did--and he even remembered the *poem*, which began, "Fortunate Alphonse, the shy homosexual . . . "[6] He told me, with a sigh, "Yes, I took longer then." (179)

Ashbery's first piece published by the Advocate is one of the most striking from that period, though also one of the least like the mature Ashbery. Rarely would Ashbery write again in such abbreviated syntax as " Nearing night / Locks tongue, ties eye." And rarely would he address his reader with such direct force:

. . . keep rude hands from sight
Nor with speech design fidelities.
Break vows as fagots: ignore
Promises, prayers, . . .

In later poems such as "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" and "Paradoxes and Oxymorons" he would address the reader somewhat more obliquely, with a gentler tone. Rarely, too, would Ashbery again refer so explicitly to religion in his poetry. Ashbery's "Amos" is a sort of inverted sermon, where the speaker--instead of elaborating on the God-positive significance of the passage at hand--recommends a whole new approach to spirituality, a makeshift, provisional path that downplays moral codes and correctness: vows and prayers are outmoded; one is admonished to "travel light," to "move as water," to "touch nothing long"; kindness is found in keeping one's distance, in cultivating a "vast disinterest," rather than staunch obedience to religious rules. Ashbery's speaker seems to be expounding something more akin to the iconoclasm and detachment of a Zen Buddhism than a traditionally faithful Christianity. It is striking to imagine Ashbery reading this rather radical, somewhat anti-establishment poem at the Commencement ceremonies of Harvard College Class of '49, which he did as the elected Class Poet for that year (Shoptaw 38).

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[6] The poem beginning "Fortunate Alphonse. . ." has not been located. See the "Chronological Checklist of All Publication in Periodicals of Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara to 1953" of the present thesis for further details.

More like the mature Ashbery, and at least as good verse as "Amos," is "The Perfect Orange." "The Perfect Orange" has characteristic Ashberyan qualities: a confident, authoritative tone coupled with a certain ambiguity of reference. The poem reads like a short eclogue set in some placeless pasture. We know nearly nothing of the context of the dialogue, nor anything of the two speakers themselves, except their sex. We do not know exactly why it is (nor, for that matter, exactly what it is) they are "foregoing, foregoing." The "end of sacrifice" may well be love, which here is "only general," and thus foregone, failed. The poem has a tangible atmosphere of lack--a grave, imperturbable absence of intimacy--and is an odd opposite of a Marvellian carpe diem piece: rather than seizing the pleasures and vivacities of life, when the beast "Time" is in view, the speakers resign themselves to a haunting torpor. As with Ashbery's "Amos," "The Perfect Orange" seems set against a background of compromised religiosity: in the third and final speech, the hand of god has only a "certain" sanctity, a particular and thus partial holiness, and encloses a sun that is characterized not primarily as a "heavenly" body, nor as homonymous with the "Son," but simply as "the perfect orange"--an earthly, arguably secular metaphor. There is something genuinely resonant here: the piece reminds one of Beckett's absurd dialogues, or some of the more radical early Auden, such as the "Epilogue"[7] to The Orators (1932). One might also be reminded of Harold Bloom's later, excellent characterization of Ashbery's poetry as offering a "curious radiance" and "qualified epiphanies" (Bloom, John Ashbery 54-55). The elegiac tone found in "The Perfect Orange," as well as the theme of resignation, or "defeatism," as Ashbery would later call it, would characterize much of his mature poetry.[8]

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[7] Though not easily recognized by title, this is the relatively famous poem that opens "O where are you going? said reader to rider."

[8] For Ashbery's use of the term "defeatism," see John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch (A Conversation) Tucson, Arizona: Interview Press, [1965?], 19-20.

Several of Ashbery's Advocate pieces seem to be love poems, yet have a odd evasiveness or vagueness about them. In his 1994 critical study on Ashbery, John Shoptaw interestingly calls attention to the Cold War climate in the United States just following the second World War, and argues that this atmosphere of intolerance, especially toward homosexual activity, helped to form Ashbery's unconventional and somewhat "impersonal" style of writing:

> But although, or rather because, Ashbery leaves himself and his homosexuality out of his poetry, his poems misrepresent in a particular way which I will call "homotextual." Rather than simply hiding or revealing some homosexual content, these poems misrepresent and "behave" differently, no matter what their subject. With their distortions, evasions, omissions, obscurities, and discontinuities, Ashbery's poems always have a homotextual dimension. This homotextuality is historically conditioned. Ashbery's poetics evolved during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a particularly repressive and paranoid period of American history marked by the investigation and harassment of homosexuals and Communists by Senator McCarthy, the House Un-American Activities Committee, the FBI, the Selective Service System, and the police. In 1950, for example, a Senate Report declared "sexual perverts" a security risk, alleging their greater susceptibility to persuasion and blackmail by foreign agents. (Shoptaw 4)

While it may be impossible to confirm Shoptaw's sweeping claim that the source of all Ashbery's obliquities is to be found in the poet's sexual orientation, one may sense in several of Ashbery's Advocate pieces a need for "reticence" about romantic love, even in the famous poem "Some Trees":

> To meet as far, this morning,
> From the world as agreeing
> With it, you and I
> Are suddenly what the trees try
>
> To tell us we are;
> . . . .
> Our days put on such reticence,
> These accents seem their own defence.

In Ashbery's poem "For a European Child," one has a sense not only of reticence but of extreme introversion:

> And no lovers struggle to image in each other
> Their unspeakable desires, each turning, rather,
> Inward for that definition, as you do now.

In the opening of Ashbery's 1947 poem "Berceuse," a piece Shoptaw does not mention, one finds perhaps the clearest depiction of danger associated with sexual love; the poem is all the more disturbing being framed as a "berceuse" (lullaby), when its content is anything but comforting:

> Sleep, love, in our little gabled room
> Outside whose door stands no one knows
> Rustling a paper, in plain clothes.
> He hounds all imagery now
> And mingling in our muted kiss
> Would be, almost, a part of us

While one can persuasively argue that the speaker of this stanza fears the possibility that his sexuality is under surveillance and may be "policed" (by a "plain clothes" or undercover officer), and that dread of discovery pervades his thoughts ("hounds all imagery now"), one must hesitate to conclude that all of Ashbery's later obliquity is clearly explicable as a poetic distortion of his sexual orientation; if that were the case, it would likely make Ashbery a very dull poet, with the concealment of love as his sole theme.[9]

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[9] Shoptaw's method as well as conclusions seem questionable to me. He admits that Ashbery does not think of himself as "a gay poet" (4), and that Ashbery denies his poetry aims to be systematic (10), and that Ashbery "rarely revises by crypt words on paper" (7), yet Shoptaw still claims that one of the most central features of Ashbery's poetry--in its supposedly "homotextual" and "misrepresentative" capacity--is its tendency to employ a kind of "cryptography" whereby a phrase such as "mincing flag" suggests a hidden phrase such as "mincing fag" (6). This seems a dubious method not only because Ashbery's self-understanding and writing practise seem to speak against the hypothesis that "cryptography" is one of the poet's central writing strategies, but also because there can be no clear criteria for judging whether a particular "cryptographic" reading is "correct" or appropriate. Shoptaw suggests, for instance, that underneath the line "a free / Bride on the rails" there lies "Free ride" and "ride the rails" (8). Yet one might rather argue that the passage suggests something such as "Fresh bride" and "on the tails" (as in a narrative in which a man takes a new bride immediately following his divorce). The problem is that--in the absence of manuscript evidence--such readings must all-too-heavily depend upon the critic's own imaginative and associational tendencies.

However, the question of the relationship between language and sexual orientation in the work of the New York School poets is an intriguing one, which, unfortunately, I do not have space to treat adequately here. There are several references to O'Hara and others teasing Koch for having a mild case of "H.D." or "Homosexual Dread," a feeling that apparently arose when Koch realized (which he must have continually done) that nearly all of his closest male friends were gay (see, for example, the play by O'Hara and Rivers, "Kenneth Koch: A Tragedy"). One wonders, for instance, if Koch's sense of being (at times) a "minority" heterosexual might have somehow informed his writing.

Donald Hall, in "The Old Life," recounts being at parties as a Harvard sophomore and "gossiping with Frank / who finished every verbal sortie with / a last word emitted / in the ruthless melody of camp" (48). Henry Abelove--Harvard Class of '66, now Professor of English at Wesleyan University--has recently suggested that "Frank O'Hara didn't talk (and write) the way he did because gay men talked that way. Gay men talk the way they talk today because of Frank O'Hara" (personal communication). Clearly there are fascinating questions in the air.

Another Harvard Advocate piece of special interest is the short story "Fete Galante," which is one of the very few works of fiction Ashbery has published besides A Nest of Ninnies (1969), the collaborative novel he wrote with James Schuyler. At first glance, "Fete Galante" may not seem at all like the mature Ashbery, yet there are congruities. "Fete Galante" seems to prefigure a later, more obviously witty Ashbery, an Ashbery that would not come to the fore until perhaps the early 1960s, with poems like "Thoughts of a Young Girl" in The Tennis Court Oath (1962). A passage such as this from "Fete Galante" is a typically Ashberyan double-take:

> "Mr. Wylie wishes me to say that he is sorry to have missed so much of the party, but will soon be with you. Meanwhile let me remind you that it lacks but five minutes of midnight! At midnight everyone unmasks!"
>
> But no one is wearing a mask.[10]

There is a certain self-reflexiveness and metafictional questioning in "Fete Galante" as well, qualities that abound in the poet's later work; imagine, for example, the following passage broken up into carefully-measured lines of verse, and imagine it appearing as a passage in a poem of Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror, perhaps between "Worsening Situation" and "Forties Flick"--an easy fit:

> Why does she talk like this? Is this the way they talk in real life? Does she love this man? That's the important question. But try and get a look at him in the phoney light from the foyer, or hear him, really, his voice soaring into the ultra-effeminate, or full and carefully modulated, or sinking into a bestial monotone, like drums or the sound in a sea-shell.

And the conclusion of "Fete Galante," too, has a typically New York Schoolian juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary, as well as what I have called the "resonant mysteriousness" that is native to Ashbery's work in particular:

> And someone is whispering very close, a velvety voice:
>
> "YOU WILL GO ON A TRIP. A MAN WITH BROWN EYES WILL SEND A GIFT -- A JEWEL. A BROADWAY STAR LENDS YOU HER FLAT. YOUR LIFE IS WOVEN OF DARK THREADS OF FORGETFULNESS AND GOLD THREADS OF JOY."

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[10] Compare these lines from "Worsening Situation" in Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (1975): ". . . My wife / Thinks I'm in Oslo--Oslo, France, that is."

Here Ashbery frames or justifies (or even "excuses") his mysteriousness by making it clear that the speaker is the fortune teller--a character from whom we expect the exotic, the cryptic, the enigmatic--but in Ashbery's later work he will nearly always do away with such devices; he will have no fear of leaving the identity of his speakers unspecified, nor of leaving contexts and references ambiguous or unclear. Indeed, soon after Harvard, Ashbery's verse would begin to become considerably odder, "crazier"; Kenneth Koch remembers Ashbery once saying to him at Harvard,

> "Kenneth, I think our work should be more crazy." And then he told me that he'd gotten this idea from reading Alfred Jarry--Ubu Roi and other things. So I read Jarry and I agreed with John that our work should be crazier. (Londry interview 113)

It is interesting to note how much Ashbery would change and yet also stay the same: while his poetry would become increasingly enigmatic, and his references increasingly difficult to pin down (and his poems thus less and less paraphrasable), his work--from the "Symington" poems of 1945 to his most recent volume, Can You Hear, Bird of 1995--would quite consistently maintain the elegance of syntax and diction, the authority in tone, and the confident, often meditative cadence evident in so many of his Advocate pieces.

Frank O'Hara

The last of the three poets to enter Harvard, Francis Russell O'Hara was born in 1926, in Baltimore, Maryland, but was raised mostly in Grafton and Worcester, Massachusetts. There were glimmerings of a literary background for Frank O'Hara even before he was born: his mother, then Kay Broderick, met her future husband, Russell O'Hara, at an English course he taught at the Worcester Business Institute (Gooch 15). Russell O'Hara would soon move on from teaching English, however, to learn "his family's patchwork of businesses," including the managing of a large farm. Though the young Frank O'Hara read voraciously, often discussing what he read with some of his lively-minded aunts--especially his Aunt Margaret, a local librarian who greatly encouraged O'Hara's intellectual explorations--he was at first a little suspicious of poetry, thinking there was something "sissy" about it.[11] O'Hara overcame this hesitancy, however, and during his Harvard years wrote an extraordinary amount of both poetry and prose. The earliest extant poem, "The Highway," is dated October 13, 1946--from his first semester at Harvard (O'Hara, Early Writing 5). Poetry, however, even during O'Hara's Harvard days, was not his first and best love: he enrolled at Harvard initially as a music major, but in his second year switched to English literature. In his third and fourth years O'Hara seems to have thought himself as much a fiction writer and a playwright as a poet. O'Hara's first publications--one short play and two short stories--appeared in spring and fall 1948 issues of The Harvard Advocate.[12]

The playlet "O the Dangers of Daily Living"--O'Hara's first publication--appeared in the Advocate of March 1948. Published in O'Hara's second year at Harvard, the play has many qualities that would show up in his later poetry and dramatic works: it is absurd, witty, chatty, funny, and wry. Perhaps, however, one quality lacking here that will show up later is a kind of warmth. The play is a witty jumble, a miniature comedy of manners, which perhaps impresses and amuses more than it moves the reader. John Ciardi, who taught O'Hara freshman English and later Poetry Composition, had these impressions of O'Hara's writings at Harvard:

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[11] Frank O'Hara mentioned this early "suspicion" to Bill Berkson many years later (Gooch 26).

[12] It is easy to forget the early importance of fiction to O'Hara. In the contributor's note to his first publication in Poetry, "Ann Arbor Variations," in December 1951, he stresses fiction's role in his life, "At present [Frank O'Hara] is at work on a novel." The novel never appeared, though its unfinished manuscript exists in the Frank O'Hara archive in the care of Maureen Granville-Smith.

> [A]side from picking and probing at his papers (I could teach him nothing but only hope to stir him a little closer to his own questions) his wit was a sort of wall around him. He showed his brilliance rather than his feelings. --That was a point I often made in talking about his writing. I think, in fact, it was when he learned to use his brilliance to *convey* rather than to *hide behind* that he found his power. (Ciardi, "Letter" 19)

Most of O'Hara's Advocate pieces, as striking as they are, do not seem to resonate with much feeling, do not convey the warm openness that would endear much of his best, later work to readers. Perhaps one important exception is "A Prayer for Prospero," which--though published nearly a year after O'Hara had graduated from Harvard--was apparently composed in Cambridge, sometime in November 1949 (Collected Poems 654n).[13]

Far different from the chatty dialogue of "O the Dangers," Frank O'Hara's next Advocate piece is dense, enigmatic, bold prose, employing a forceful, sure cadence. "The Unquiet Grave" does not read as if written by the same author as "O the Dangers." There is nothing chatty or conversational about a line such as, "The head, with long snaky neck and flapping lips, fluttered in the wind, its florid leaves smiling and grinning in turn." The heavily alliterated "fl" sounds in this, the first sentence of the piece, and the apostrophe "Oh" in the sentence that follows, are just two of the many early indications that the reader should expect a decidedly poetic prose. The piece might be in some sense ultimately ununderstandable, but perhaps interestingly so, as are some of Samuel Beckett's very short, enigmatic prose works--evocative of an atmosphere or psychological state, without being denotatively definite in signification.

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[13] This poem is discussed below.

The title of O'Hara's next piece, "Not with a Bang . . .," alludes to the famous last line of "The Hollow Men" by T.S. Eliot,[14] though O'Hara's story perhaps more resembles something by Hemingway: for instance, "Hills Like White Elephants," in which the "story"--the setting, the characters, the plot--is created almost solely out of dialogue, and a short, pithy dialogue at that.[15] "Not with a Bang . . ." is perhaps the least interesting, or least accomplished, of O'Hara's Advocate pieces--often being annoyingly glib--though it does have moments of interesting and skillfully-rendered dialogue. While the story seems to have little stylistically to do with Eliot, its content and ending may echo "The Hollow Men" somewhat: the characters in "Not with a Bang. . ." may be seen to be engaged in hollow or meaningless banter, underneath which lie questionable motives--it is, after all, a scene of a failed (and deliberately foiled) pick-up in a bar; and, as well, the conclusion of the story may be as much a "whimper" or fizzling-out as the meaning and rhythm of Eliot's last line.

The surrealistic poem "The Drummer" reveals another side to O'Hara that could not have been predicted if one had seen only his previous Advocate pieces. This, O'Hara's first published poem, seems a romp of disjunctiveness, perhaps reminiscent of William Carlos Williams' poem "Great Mullen,"[16] with its excited incomprehensibility yet convincing flow. "The Drummer" seems to resist, at every turn, the reader's attempt to discern a coherent narrative or setting. From the first word the reader is disoriented, groping for a dictionary. "Baraban," however, is not to be found even in the O.E.D., and only, perhaps, after one settles upon such an obscure reference work as The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments does one even discover that a "baraban" is a drum. It is in fact a "double-headed drum of the eastern Slavs" which is "used at wedding ceremonies and for dance accompaniment," and which "in the 16th and 17th centuries . . . was also a military instrument." The poem quickly takes us from this Eastern Slavic reference into a modern locomotive, and then onto a camel (dromedary) which is also "a whale!" and excretes "bison cakes." Several of the figures of this poem seem so disparate in origins as to be able to exist in no single, plausible setting: camels (the Middle East), Pawnees (North America), banshees (Ireland), kangaroos (Australia). Yet perhaps partly because of its untamable content, the poem has its own attractive, even electric, energy and flow.

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[14] "*Not with a bang but a whimper.*"

[15] It is interesting to note that, while at Harvard, Frank O'Hara apparently felt little conscious affinity with Hemingway: "Hemingway's problem was not mine, whether he solved it successfully or not I can learn little from him. It is so far removed from me that I scarcely know what it is or how successful he is . . ." ("Journal," Early Writing 101).

[16] The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, volume I, 162-163; for commentary on this poem, see Wallace, 2nd ed. 267-269; see also Terrell 49, 374.

O'Hara's next Advocate piece is as surrealistic as "The Drummer" but has an impressively coherent yet bizarre narrative, one which makes the poem that much more engaging than "The Drummer." If "The Drummer" is akin to a connect-the-dots in which the dots are neither connected nor connectable, O'Hara's next Advocate piece, "Poem," is like a connect-the-dots where each connection is made as we go along, and the picture, bizarre as it is, emerges onto the page, distending itself unpredictably and continually as we read the poem through to the end. In fact, "Poem" might aptly be referred to as "distensive" (to coin a term) rather than disjunctive. There is a surprise in nearly every line, but each surprise is connected to and builds on the previous one. Rather than presenting the reader with one after another weird item that one cannot fit into the whole, "Poem" begins and ends with comprehensibility, and its surrealism consists of its continually expanding, revising--distending--the reader's impression of what is happening.

Perhaps O'Hara's last-published Advocate piece is one of the clearest harbingers of his mature poetry. In "Prayer to Prospero," Frank O'Hara seems to transcend the tendency to "hide behind" his brilliance and instead uses his literary prowess to write a quiet, tender poem:

> you are guardian of our
> faculties and we owe you
> what beauty we attain to
>
> your kingdom always is
> manifest in villains virgins
> everything we understand

and hazard leads us to you
with its invisible voice
or destroys us apart alone

neglect us not now we are
free our need is difficult
strangers steal our voice (lines 10-21)

The quietness and modest tone created by the lower-case letters, the regular stanzas, as well as total lack of punctuation, is similar to that which one finds in "Morning," one of O'Hara's greatest love poems. Both poems whisper. Listen to the same hushed insistence in the closing lines of "Morning":

. . . it

is difficult to think
of you without me in
the sentence you depress
me when you are alone

Last night the stars
were numerous and today
snow is their calling
card I'll not be cordial

there is nothing that
distracts me music is
only a crossword puzzle
do you know how it is

when you are the only
passenger if there is a
place further from me
I beg you do not go

"A Prayer to Prospero" was one of the first poems Frank O'Hara wrote that has the feel of being "addressed" to someone, the addressee in this case being an actor he knew--Thayer David or, alternatively, David Hershey[17]--who played Prospero in a Brattle Hall production of Shakespeare's The Tempest. Years later, in his mock-manifesto of 1959, Frank O'Hara would say that the poetry of "Personism" (the mock-movement he had just "invented")

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[17] See the textual headnote to this poem for further details.

> puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. (Standing Still 111)

There is as much truth as satire in this passage, and many of O'Hara's best poems would indeed have the intimacy and amiability of a letter to a friend or lover. The mature O'Hara would be able to write poems that are witty, are surrealistic, but yet are also--as his poem "Avenue A" would put it--"delicate and caressing."

The Poets Together

It seems that for most of their time at Harvard the literary friendship that mattered most to Koch and Ashbery was that which they had with each other. They quickly became close, and showed each other their poetry "almost daily" (Londry interview with Ashbery 99). They shared interests in French literature and surrealism, they shared the vocation of poetry, and they made influential reading recommendations to each other: Ashbery suggested the craziness of Jarry and the meditativeness of Proust to Koch, and Koch helped Ashbery appreciate the colloquial poetry of William Carlos Williams (Londry interviews 99, 113, 114). The Harvard writings of both poets share a tendency toward the enigmatic and the surrealistic, and in some instances there is even a striking similarity in diction. Compare, for example, the closing lines of Ashbery's poem "Point of Departure"

> But all escape prefigures
> The choices and goodbyes
> And freedom like a statue
> Dominates the square:
> In classic Greek attire
> And formal in all weathers.

with the beginning of a speech from Koch's verse play Little Red Riding Hood (Koch, Garrison Prize MS):

> RED RIDING HOOD: Yes, I seem to recognize the place
> As though its weather were indelible
> And formal in my mind.

O'Hara would take longer to come on to the scene, but when he did he made a vivid, lasting impression on both Ashbery and Koch. John Ashbery met Frank O'Hara a month before graduating from Harvard, and he recollects this meeting in "A Reminiscence" published in Homage to Frank O'Hara (1978):

> I first met Frank at a cocktail party at the Mandrake Book Shop in Cambridge in the spring of 1949. I believe the occasion for the party was an exhibition of water-colours by Edward Gorey, who at the time was Frank's roommate. I had known who Frank was for some time--he had submitted poems and stories to the *Advocate*, of which I was an editor, and we had published some. I had thought several times of introducing myself when we passed each other on the street, but each time I held back. Frank's

> normal expression--the one into which his face settled when he was thinking about something--was a tough, aggressive one which I later found out did not necessarily reflect his mood (though it certainly *could* on occasion!). So it was rather a surprise when I overheard a ridiculous remark such as I liked to make uttered in a ridiculous voice that sounded to me like my own, and to realize that the speaker was Frank. He said: "Let's face it, *Les Sécheresses* is greater than *Tristan*." I know that *Les Sécheresses* was a vocal work by Poulenc which had been performed recently at Harvard; I also know, back in those dull and snobbish days, that nobody at Harvard took Poulenc or any other modern composer (except Hindemith, Piston, and Stravinsky), seriously, and that this assertion was in the way of a pleasant provocation. Also, I was somehow aware, it summed up a kind of aesthetic attitude which was very close to my own. I knew instinctively that Frank didn't really believe that *Les Sécheresses* was greater than *Tristan*, and that he wanted people to understand this, but at the same time he felt it important to make that statement, possibly because he felt that art is already serious enough; there is no point in making it seem even more serious by taking it too seriously. (20)

The common ground that was evident to Ashbery in this overheard remark went beyond the poets' aesthetic stances, their interests in the avant-garde, and their appreciation of non-literary art forms. Ashbery also heard an uncommon resemblance even in their voices and manner of speaking:

> I don't know what the significance of this was, but it fascinated us and was doubtless one reason why we became friends so quickly after our first meeting. On the telephone, I was told, we were all but indistinguishable. Once when I was at Frank's apartment in New York I picked up the phone and impersonated Frank to Joe LeSueur, one of Frank's closest friends, pretending to pick a quarrel with him for several minutes during which he was entirely taken in. (20)

This first meeting with O'Hara convinced Ashbery "to try to spend as much time as possible in his company during the few weeks that remained before my graduation from Harvard. Not since I had met Kenneth Koch a couple of years before had I encountered anyone so stimulating, with such a powerfully personal way of looking at art and poetry and at the world" (20). Ashbery would later cherish these last few weeks in Cambridge as "almost idyllic" because he had "discovered a wonderful new friend and we gave each other attention and encouragement" and because "we didn't know so many people and could often be alone together" (21). Later on, when both poets moved to New York, "it was difficult to see [O'Hara] alone. New York discovered him and his radiant magnetism almost as soon as he moved there" (21). Yet Ashbery sees the transition from Harvard to New York as generally an auspicious one:

> We were serious [while at Harvard] but we were also a little unintentionally funny in our aesthetes' pose, and a little pathetic. Nobody but ourselves and a handful of adepts knew or cared about our poetry, or seemed likely to in the future. Though Cambridge teemed with poets who would later become celebrated (Bly, Creeley, Donald Hall, Adrienne Rich, Richard Wilbur) we did not know them well, if at all, except for Koch who had already graduated the year before, and V.R. Lang whose close friendship with Frank had only just begun. And despite their presence, Cambridge seemed to me then a place where anything adventurous in poetry or the arts was subtly discouraged . . . . Later on, in the more encouraging climate of New York, we could begin to be ourselves, but much of the poetry we both wrote as undergraduates now seems marred by a certain nervous preciosity, in part a reaction to the cultivated blandness around us which also impelled us to callow aesthetic pronouncements. (21)[18]

Ashbery soon wrote enthusiastically to Kenneth Koch--then living in New York and preparing to leave for France on a Fulbright--about this "wonderful new friend" and his writing. Koch recalls:

> John sent me some of Frank's poems from Harvard. He said, "Here's a new contender," or something like that, "I think he's pretty good." [At first] I didn't really see what [Frank's poetry] was doing. But I took the poems along with me, when I went to Europe. I was in Provence, but I took a trip to Vienna, and on the way to Vienna on a train I read his poems again, and suddenly, wham! Frank inscribed his first book to me: "To Kenneth, and the Vienna conversion." (Herd interview 28)

Koch elsewhere elaborates on the "Vienna conversion," the sudden appreciation that arose when he read O'Hara's poems for the second time:

> This time they seemed to me marvellous; I was very excited about them. Also very intimidated. I believe I liked them for the same reasons I had not liked them before--i.e. because they were sassy, colloquial, and full of realistic detail. ("A Note about Frank O'Hara" 26)

A bond quickly developed between Koch and O'Hara when Koch finally returned to Manhattan about two years later:

> It was not till the summer of 1952 (after coming back from Europe, I had gone to California for a year) that I got to know Frank well. *Know* is not really the right word, since it suggests something fairly calm and intellectual. This was something much more emotional and wild. Frank in

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[18] See Ashbery's remarks in the second appendix of the present thesis for a later, somewhat more positive view of Harvard's artistic atmosphere.

> his first two years in New York was having this kind of explosive effect on a lot of people he met. Larry Rivers later said that Frank had a way of making you feel you were terribly important and that this was very inspiring, which is true, but it was more than that. His presence and his poetry made things go on around him which could not have happened in the same way if he hadn't been there. I know this is true of my poetry; and I would guess it was true also of the poetry of James Schuyler and John Ashbery, and of the painting of Jane Freilicher, Larry Rivers, Mike Goldberg, Grace Hartigan and other painters too. (Koch, "A Note about Frank O'Hara" 26)

In New York during the early fifties, the three poets became very close to several painters, the first of whom were Jane Freilicher and Larry Rivers. Koch later described the "central gang" at least "for a while" as the latter two painters plus Ashbery, O'Hara, and Koch himself (Herd interview 28). Quite quickly, the poets would become friends and supporters of many of the Abstract Expressionists, nearly all of whom lived in the New York area. It was in fact through their association with the Abstract Expressionists--a subset of "the New York School of Painting"--that the three poets (along with later poetic colleagues such as Barbara Guest and James Schuyler) would eventually be labelled the New York School of Poets, a label none of them encouraged, which yet stuck.[19]

The interest in modern visual art was one that Ashbery, O'Hara, and Koch had in common even before they met. Given their special interest in surrealist art and literature it is no surprise that, once in New York, they would develop an affinity with Abstract Expressionism, a movement with strong roots in the Surrealist tradition. Frank O'Hara in "Larry Rivers: A Memoir" recounts:

> [B]eing poets, [we] divided our time between the literary bar, the San Remo, and the artists' bar, the Cedar Tavern. In the San Remo we argued and gossiped; in the Cedar we often wrote poems while listening to the painters argue and gossip. So far as I know nobody painted in the San Remo while they listened to the writers argue. An interesting sidelight to these social activities was that for most of us non-academic, and indeed non-literary poets in the sense of the American scene at the time, the painters were the only generous audience for our poetry, and most of us read first publicly in art galleries or at The Club. The literary establishment cared about as much for our work as the Frick [Gallery] cared for Pollock and de

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[19] For variegated views on the origins and aptness of this label see Anne Waldman, "A Paraphrase," Homage to Frank O'Hara; John Ashbery, "The Art of Poetry XXXIII," The Paris Review; Kenneth Koch, "Allen Ginsberg & Kenneth Koch: From a Conversation," The Poetry Project Newsletter; and John Myer's introduction to his 1969 anthology The Poets of the New York School.

> Kooning, not that we cared any more for establishments than they did . . . .
> (169)

The art world of New York was not only a good early audience for these poets, but also produced some of the poets' first patrons. Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara--between 1952 and 1953--each had his first collection of poetry published by Editions of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, whose editor was John Bernard Myers. Myers had been the managing editor of View, the New York surrealist periodical, until it ceased publication in 1947; he had begun a marionette company with Tibor de Nagy, an art patron recently emigrated from Hungary; and with de Nagy he founded an art gallery that became one of the most important showcases for Abstract Expressionists in New York. Myers' literary interests remained strong while he was managing the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and he decided to publish chapbooks of the work of the three promising young poets soon after he met them at a Southampton cottage rented by Jane Freilicher in the summer of 1952 (Myers, Tracking the Marvelous 136).

Throughout the fifties and sixties the three poets, often with several of their artist friends, would collaborate on many projects. Even the Tibor de Nagy chapbooks were collaborations of a sort: each included original prints by artists, and copies were signed by both author and artist. Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara would write plays together, including the unpublished piece titled "Play" of 1953. O'Hara and Rivers wrote the gossipy playlet "Kenneth Koch: A Tragedy." They acted in each other's plays: Ashbery played the lead role, John, in O'Hara's Try! Try!: A Noh Play. Koch and Ashbery collaborated on writing the poem "Crone Rhapsody," for which they gave themselves very strict rules:

> that every line contain the name of a flower, a tree, a fruit, a game, and a famous old lady, as well as the word *bathtub*; furthermore, the poem is a sestina and all the end-words are pieces of office furniture.
> (Quoted in Ward 126)

Just as Koch and Ashbery had showed each other poems "almost daily" while at Harvard, Koch and O'Hara read each other new lines every day while they worked in 1953 on long poems--Second Avenue in O'Hara's case, and the 2400-line When the Sun Tries to Go On in Koch's. Even though Ashbery moved to France in 1955, he kept up a strong correspondence with O'Hara and Koch. Once Koch wrote asking Ashbery's advice on his new poem, "Fresh Air"--a lyrico-comic tirade against academic poetry, parts of which Koch was afraid were "too loud and boisterous"--and Ashbery replied with solid encouragement, referring to the poem as a work of "searing beauty," and encouraging Koch to leave "all those parts in; the effect of profound quiet which the work induces depends so much on its necessary loudness and screechiness. The louder the better, says this reader" (quoted Lehman, "Dr. Fun" 54). The poets also (favourably) reviewed each other's work in literary journals, and even read each other's work at poetry readings (something rarely done today). David Lehman reports that O'Hara once referred to Koch as "the backbone of a tremendous poetry nervous system (O'Hara meant his own)," and that Ashbery, introducing Koch at a reading in New York in the 1960s, said that Koch's poetry "occupies my mind to the point where I might be said to live inside it" ("Dr. Fun" 54). Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara were clearly the closest of friends and the closest of colleagues.

Whether or not this friendship and colleagueship is aptly called a "school" is perhaps not the essential question. The three poets were obviously a close-knit group--with literary and artistic concerns at the heart of their relationships with each other--and to say "school" or "group" is not to say "mob" (implying a lack of individuality) nor is it to say "clique" (implying close-mindedness and closed ranks). In fact, perhaps one of the things that most characterizes the three poets is a kind of openness. Ashbery once said that "there is no systematic rationale or systematic anything in my poetry. If it is systematic, it's only in its total avoidance of any kind of system or program" (quoted in Shoptaw 10). Among Koch's favourite words is apparently "formulalessness."[20] Questioning the need for "elaborately sounded structures," O'Hara once wrote, "You just go on your nerve" ("Personism" 110). While in other contexts each of the three poets would speak further about their poetics and show a sophisticated understanding of poetic theory as well as literary history, there would remain a decidedly non-stodgy, open and exploratory tendency at the centre of their poetry from their Harvard years onward. In all three poets' work, an unabashed experimentalism, a deep appreciation for the improvisatory, an emotional candour and a distinctive *joie de vivre* continue to attract and influence generations of poets well into the late decades of the twentieth century.

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[20] See Ellman 1129n, and Lehman, "Dr. Fun" 58.

The Texts from The Harvard Advocate

Note on the Texts

I reprint here, in chronological order of publication, all writings from The Harvard Advocate that were listed as authored by either John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, or Frank O'Hara during the early careers of these writers. In all cases my copy-texts are the versions printed in The Harvard Advocate, though I make occasional emendations on the basis of extant manuscripts or later published versions of the pieces. My emendations are briefly explained in the textual headnotes.

Since the present critical edition concerns poetic beginnings, especially the Harvard writings of the three poets, I have not taken as authoritative (for my purposes) the later post-Harvard revisions of certain of these writings. My aim is to print the pieces as the poets in their Harvard days wished them to appear.

Often the Advocate has eccentric or inconsistent spacing, punctuation, and spelling. In many cases, without strong evidence to support another reading, I follow the Advocate. At many points I call attention to textual eccentricities in either the textual headnotes or by the use of the "[*sic*]" symbol, but I have not done this in every case, since doing so would drastically compromise readability.

The publication information in the sections "Anthology Publication" and "Further Publication" may not be exhaustive, but I have aimed to check many of the most plausible anthologies and collections, and my listings should be representative enough to make certain patterns clear.

John Ashbery "A Sermon: Amos 8:11-14"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.1 (April 1947): 12.
Composition: MSS of this poem at Houghton are dated July 1946 and August 1946. File: "A Sermon: Amos 11-14*" from Box 29 of the Ashbery Papers.
Anthology Publication: McIntyre, Douglas A., and Karen S. Hull, eds., The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1987).
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: In all MS versions of this poem in the Ashbery Papers at Houghton, there is a stanza break between the eighteenth and nineteenth lines, such that "From shore line the swimmer" begins a new stanza. I read this stanza break over the Advocate printed version. The Advocate has a period (or faultily printed comma) after the phrase "My people" in the last stanza. I emend this to a comma on the strength of the manuscript versions at Houghton, which all read a comma at that point in the poem.

A SERMON: Amos 8:11-14

And they shall wander from sea to sea, and
from the north even to the east; they shall run
to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and
shall not find it. In that day shall the fair
virgins and the young men faint for thirst.

In this land travel light
And lightly: keep rude hands from sight
Nor with speech design fidelities.
Break vows as fagots: ignore
Promises, prayers, lusting before the door,
Nor press the sinning Tartar to his knees.

Move as water: soon gone
Lightly girdling the dry stone.
Touch nothing long: involve
Nothing ever. Your fate and history
Meet in geometry
And in radiant law dissolve.

I explain: imagine
A young man or fair virgin
At dark, at sea's edge wading.
And now drawn in a strange light
Into the sea. Nearing night
Locks tongue, ties eye. Fading

From shore line the swimmer
Forms with his ocean brother
A complex unity: sea immolates
Matter in distance, and he or she
Buries desire in motion. And does not see
Where, at far left, oars raised, a small boat waits.

My people, what is intended
Let the cool martyr, whose distant head

Now seems a swimming dog's, explore,
Sustained in a vast disinterest.
But learn that distances are kindest
Not the correct sun striking the shore.

Kenneth Koch "Nocturn & Aubade"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 3. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: A MS version of this poem has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

NOCTURN & AUBADE

Now, as a child, descend, descend;
You will grow as fat as cream, ---
And float to the top
With your bones undressed
By the angry limestone of dream.

Now, at the glass, pretend, pretend:
Balance your swimming face, ---
Or know, as it rocks,
How love must move
Through nakedness to grace.

Kenneth Koch "Carnival"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 4. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: A MS version of this poem has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

CARNIVAL

Everything now resolves
into the known horizon of breakfast:
the clatter of spoons, mixing morning and night, bringing the bear
fresh into the amazing intricacy of summer.

Hands unbelieving on the Buick's dreamless chromium,
you are startled by the sun,
as an immigrant who finds himself suddenly uttering perfect poems
in a new awkward language---

Or rather the brain starts
like an awakened wild animal
who has been racing in his sleep
through a country full of trees.

Kenneth Koch "Program Notes"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 4. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: A MS version of this poem has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None
Further Publication: None.

PROGRAM NOTES

That floating dancer
Rules the cardboard towns;
Those he will love wear
Yellow spangled gowns.

They will pirouette their love,
Move away and close, --
Sandcastle limbs with his
In a loving pose.

He is heavy in your eyes
When, dreaming overmuch,
You feel the crazy leap through space
Is effortless as touch.

I could rule a cardboard town
And stroke your hair,
But I should leave you if I made
That triumph over air.

Kenneth Koch "In Answer to This Emptiness"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 5. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: A MS version of this poem has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

IN ANSWER
TO THIS EMPTINESS

Inside the form
there are adequate intricacies,
enough for an eagle-creation;
giant wings cleanse the air of this place,
giant surging momentary eagle
cleanses the heart,
letting it strut like a flung rock,
letting the music come in a pattern of enraptured nerves,
letting the clock give birth to twins,
letting the sea rock the air for salt,
letting the fish change color in a splendid arc of light,
letting the master of ceremonies
collect his black felt hat and go home.

Inside the form
there are words that bleed like stars,
that rush and tear at color like stars,
that bend the innocent sentence
into a terrible limb,
essence of limbo, oil-cut flesh,
gleaming phosphorescent children we cannot touch
lest the radium eat away our reason.

Inside the possible rhyme
there are bodies that fall for us,
are crushed, with the narrowest wind of danger
brushing our chests--- knives turn inward---
the sun descends in a flaming glutinous ball
over the cardboard housetops,
over the unbelievable shadows squatting on the river.

We have arrived at creation and have swallowed the mirror:
inside us glittering verities shine,
reflect, are re-reflected into speech,
are wine in the mouth, in the eyes, in the air,
are eyes in the wine of the mouth of the air. . . .

I stroke your hair and go strutting away on a pilgrimage of music.

John Ashbery "Elegy"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 6. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: MSS of this poem at Houghton are dated May 1945. The MSS also suggest that the title was at one time "Elegy," then changed simply to "Poem," then changed back to "Elegy." Files: "Elegy" from Box 27 and "Poem -- (Spring comes . . .)" from Box 30.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

ELEGY

Spring comes adept with personnel,
Apt for the kill. The charging land
Informs us where a comrade fell
In tuft of primrose for the hand,
The splintered green a token
Of what was whole and now is broken.

May lark and lilac lift pale heads
To burst the crystal of this vision
That to the winter's ice, was food:
The lecher's starved and pained precision
Saw war the torture of a single heart;
Peace in the touch of May, the bloodless killer's art.

Silent, in a sick month though green,
A girl wreathes laurel for the dead
That die in spring. I'll make my dream
Now of her fragrant hand, my last and kindest friend:
So perfect it must die in slightest motion,
Yet live, though wars infect a nation.

John Ashbery "A Fable"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 6. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: MSS at Houghton are dated March 1947 and April 3, 1947. File: "A Fable" from Box 27.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

A FABLE

The oracle would not speak, save in the character
Of someone else: an uncle, aunt, or brother.
And it was said: the menace of his authority
He dares not reveal to himself, trusting another.

Lovers in the city where his influence raged
Thought themselves lucky: "At last history moves
To a definite choice of evils; it is an action
Of which we are a part, and our stunted loves

Swell to majestic dooms. True love is greater
Than even we had supposed." They heard him deploy
Rough imagery of thunder, and the day became
Part of the past of chance, not choice. With a cry

Each clutched at his passing ego. Next day
Lovers meeting could think of nothing to say,
Like no love at first sight. And the city parted wide
Its gates for the oracle and his terrible bride.

John Ashbery "The Perfect Orange"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (May 21, 1947): 7. The cover designates this the "Commencement" issue. Page 3 further designates this the "Poetry Issue."
Composition: A MS of this poem at Houghton is dated June 1946. File: "The Perfect Orange" from Box 28.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

THE PERFECT ORANGE

HE: Foregoing, foregoing,
It seems we have foregone
Whatever was in the beginning
The end of sacrifice.
For even of sense deprived
And the holy pang of denial
The ritual goes on:
I sell my watch for a comb,[21]
You cut off your hair for a chain,
And if the night is cold
Or the wolves on the precipice howl
I hold you a little closer.

SHE: Yes, there is strength in numbers.
Yet I often wish that the stars
And the numberless walking crowds[22]
Were not so much alike.
For no matter how close we lie
Nor how hard we love each other
Our love is only general
And our faces merely vary
And our bodies in a season
Return to restock the earth
And restore its walking people
Who move like so many rocks,
Foregoing and foregoing.
Yet even as I speak
I feel like a rock in the earth

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[21] Lines 8-9 allude to "The Gift of the Magi," a short story by O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), collected in his second book, Four Million (1906). The fiction tells the story of a newly-wed New York couple at Christmas: both are poor, but each manage nonetheless to buy the other a gift; the wife has her prized hair cut and sold to a wig-maker for a few dollars, with which she buys a chain for her husband's heirloom watch; yet it happens that the husband has already sold his watch to buy his wife a beautiful comb for her hair. At the close of this tale of selfless sacrifice, O. Henry compares these gift-givers to the Magi who were the first to pay homage to the infant Jesus.

[22] Lines 14-15 might faintly echo the last stanza of W.B. Yeats's 1891 poem, "When You Are Old":

> And bending down beside the glowing bars,
> Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

And even in you, my darling
I sense the fatal chill.

Both: We have given ourselves away.
The chase has a beast in view
And the name of the beast is Time.
Beyond the sea lie the rocks
Beyond the rocks the sky
Beyond the sky the hand
Of a certain sanctity
Encloses the perfect orange.
To live in love is to die,
To die is to breathe again.
We have given ourselves away
Foregoing and foregoing.

John Ashbery "Point of Departure"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.1 (October 1947): 9. The cover designates this the "Registration Issue."
Composition: MSS of this poem at Houghton are dated November 1946. File: "Point of Departure" from Box 28.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: In line eight, the Advocate reads "on," which I emend to "On," in order to remain in keeping with the otherwise consistent capitalization of the first letter of each line. The MSS of this poem at Houghton agree with this reading.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

The planes of light and dark
Look on a hurrying man
And the seasons run together
Like the fingers of a hand
Framing his little street: the leaves
Hiss, It is time to go, and the consoling
Snow descends like a benison[23]
On the afflicted town.

Only in a dream, perhaps
Does some ogre pursue,
Or the branches of a forest
Gesture against the past.
All flight is optional here,
No passage argued, the end assured
Back to the beginning
For the track is circular.

What if its mileage led
Beyond this special city
With its pigeons and architecture?
To feel the answer, darling,
Shaping its days and words
Into a perfect freedom . . .
But all escape prefigures
The choices and goodbyes
And freedom like a statue
Dominates the square:
In classic Greek attire
And formal in all weathers.

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[23] **Benison**. "Blessing, beatitude" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

John Ashbery "Fete Galante"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.2 (November 1947): 13-14. The cover designates this the "Princeton Game Issue."
Composition: The three-leaf typescript of this short story--interestingly filed in a box labelled "Poetry A-F" among the Ashbery Papers at Houghton--is undated. File: "Fete Galante" from Box 27.
Anthology Publication: Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977).
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: Textual variants: In the MS version of this story at Houghton, the word "you" precedes "a gift" in the closing paragraph, and the entire paragraph, apparently a quote from the fortune-teller, is in regular text, not full caps as the Advocate prints it. I supply a comma after the word "really" in the fifth to last paragraph of the story since the MS at Houghton has it and the syntax seems to call for it.

FETE GALANTE

The eightieth birthday of Andrew E. Wylie! That old reprobate still alive! Imagine! In one corner of the huge foyer there is a grotto made of silver twigs, in which musicians try to rehearse a work of Telemann.[24] In another part of the room an accompanist strikes chords, but the worried soprano does not attempt to sing. There is so much noise! Two sylph-like young men, one with an accordion, the other with a guitar, hurl themselves at the groups of guests, breaking up conversation, making bad music. Nobody can talk to the same person for long, and one begins to sense one's futility. A fortune-teller has been trying to get at Lucy for several minutes, but people are always in the way, laughing and talking rather loudly, a little sad maybe. "What sign did you say you was born under, dear?" asks the lady.

Lucy repeats the odd words which enter her head, "The sign of the flying red horse." After several seconds her companions laugh at this, turning their flushed faces on Lucy. Lucy begins to laugh a little too, wondering if she meant it as a joke. The fortune-teller doesn't seem to be offended, but she looks earnestly at Lucy and tries to clutch her dress. Lucy shrinks away. "When is your birthday?"

Lucy stammers and blushes prettily and looks into her glass of champagne. "Actually", says the sweet miss, "It's today!"

Today? But why hadn't Lucy said anything? We could have had a party! But--of course we couldn't have though for everyone is here! But--we must do *something*! Right now!

The fortune-teller has something to say to Lucy, she stretches out her withered arms. "No." says Lucy in a little voice. But people seem to be joining hands for a Paul Jones,[25] a chain of intoxicated guests divides Lucy from the ancient hag. Maybe it's not a Paul Jones after all, but everyone seems to have changed his position. Now the two young men in their ruffled white shirts and black tights have found Lucy, now they drag her to the center of the great hall.

Silence! It is Rudy, Andrew E. Wylie's trusted old servant. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he calls from the top of the stairs. "Mr. Wylie wishes me to say that he is sorry to have missed so much of the party, but will soon be with you. Meanwhile let me remind you that it lacks but five minutes of midnight! At midnight everyone unmasks!"

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[24] **Georg Philipp Telemann** (1681-1767), German composer.

[25] **Paul Jones**. "A dance popular in Britain in the 1920s, in which the ladies formed an outward-facing circle moving in the opposite direction to the men, who faced inwards. The couples facing each other when the music stopped became partners for the next part of the dance, this pattern being repeated several times. It was earlier one of the 'sets' in American barn-dancing, and is perhaps named after the naval adventurer John Paul Jones (1747-92)" (Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable; cf. A Dictionary of Americanisms).

But no one is wearing a mask. Evidently this is some kind of satirical joke on the part of old Andrew E. The guests snarl a little and jostle each other, as if to say, we know we're not a very pretty lot but look who invited us here, after all. Their host's absence disturbed no one, it's the sort of thing you get to expect from that old nut. His sarcasm doesn't bother anyone either, but--the fact that he should have motives for sarcasm is a little discouraging.

Lucy is tired. All the attractive people seem to have gone home early. Or perhaps getting drunk makes them look different, there are certainly more people here than ever, all shouting and laughing, but not seeming to have a very good time. Lucy makes her way to the terrace, eluding her two companions, who apparently have forgotten her anyway. It's nice out here, the light from the tall windows makes a silver checker effect on the stone flagging, also the moonlight on the coconut palms is lovely.

"Darling", somebody says, and wraps her in pair of strong arms. His mouth descends over hers like absolute night.

"Oh stop", Lucy says presently, "You don't know how physically revolting you are to me."

"That could hardly be true in the light of certain recent events", says the man in a sulky voice. Then changing the subject, "Why didn't you let Madame Sospirio read your horoscope. She's remarkable, they all say. She predicted the atom bomb six months before it happened. She also predicted Corinne Wauchtheimer's twins."

Lucy says, twisting her long scarf, "Frank, your behavior is impossible. You must go away from here. We must not meet in public."

Why does she talk like this? Is this the way they talk in real life? Does she love this man? That's the important question. But try and get a look at him in the phoney light from the foyer, or hear him, really, his voice soaring into the ultra-effeminate, or full and carefully modulated, or sinking into a bestial monotone, like drums or the sound in a sea-shell.

Then all the lights go out, all the noise and the music stops. What a funny dead silence! Not even an echo.

Something makes Lucy's fingers explore, explore, along the balcony rail to where Frank's hand last lay. Very plump and appealing in the moonlight, it seemed. Now she has found it, now they are holding hands. What a lovely sensation.

Help! It isn't Frank's hand at all! And someone is whispering very close, a velvety voice:

"YOU WILL GO ON A TRIP. A MAN WITH BROWN EYES WILL SEND A GIFT -- A JEWEL. A BROADWAY STAR LENDS YOU HER FLAT. YOUR LIFE IS WOVEN OF DARK THREADS OF FORGETFULNESS AND GOLD THREADS OF JOY."

John Ashbery "Berceuse"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.3 (December 1947): 13. The cover designates this the "Christmas Issue."
Composition: No MS of this poem appears to be among the Ashbery Papers at Houghton.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

BERCEUSE[26]

Sleep, love, in our little gabled room
Outside whose door stands no one knows
Rustling a paper, in plain clothes.
He hounds all imagery now
And mingling in our muted kiss
Would be, almost, a part of us

But firm at the edge of wakefulness,
A stricken sandman, will assume
The squalor of our dearest crimes.
Too long I lay in a sweat with death
Till he grew small and plausible,
A third place always set at table;

And feeling his blunt profile coined
On the reverse of our endearments
Felt love was of that permanence.
Then swooned the acid in the basin
And the razor, scented, white,
Whispered the flesh: He is quite right.

Migrate beyond indifference: he
Will find out our new addresses.
Set by our days of blind caresses
From the dignity of his ruse!
So they, when we turn back to gape
May blunder on their lasting shape.

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[26] **Berceuse**. "A cradle-song, lullaby; an instrumental piece with a lulling rhythm" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

Kenneth Koch   Review of Richard Wilbur's The Beautiful Changes.

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.3 (December 1947): 28-30. The cover designates this the "Christmas Issue."
Composition: Koch almost certainly wrote this review between September and December of 1947, since the first edition of The Beautiful Changes was published in September 1947 by the New York publishers Reynal & Hitchcock (see Field 1). From the Koch Papers at Berg it is clear, however, that Koch personally knew Wilbur--who was a graduate student then junior fellow at Harvard during Koch's Harvard years--and it is possible that Koch saw a pre-publication MS version of the book.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: This review is signed simply "K.K."

The Beautiful Changes, by Richard Wilbur. Reynall [*sic*] and Hitchcock. $2.00.

After reading the poems of any good poet, one comes away with the impress of what is most accurate and original in his poetry. After reading Dr. Williams, for instance, one can see a piece of broken glass as an object with poetic connotations; one's sensibility is opened up to some degree. Since it is Wilbur's stated intention to "have objects speak," to rid his eye of "the dry disease / of thinking things no more than what he sees," we may judge his success by the effective change that is brought about in our vision. He comes off very well. We may not be able to exist in his "Gay-pocked and potsherd world," but neither will we be able to consider muscular soldiers, dodo-birds, and summers without the interference of his lightly mocking romanticism.

Most of the people who write reviews of poetry, seem to spend an unconscionable amount of effort and time in placing the new young man inside a structure of other poets that, so far as I know, does not exist. In this, his first book, Wilbur neither takes polysyllabic notes on his pocket-map of the world, nor does he seem to be assured of the doom of Western civilization, so he would be rather difficult to place anyway. He has been influenced by Wallace Stevens, Marrianne [*sic*] Moore, and Gerard Hopkins, but he has come through it all with something quite his own:

> Your hands hold roses in a way that says
> They are not only yours; the beautiful changes
> In such kind ways,
> Wishing ever to sunder
> Things and things' selves for a second finding, to lose
> For a moment all that touches it back to wonder.

At its best, as in the title-poem quoted from above, his language is brilliant; there is the energy and vitality that is an unmistakable mark of poetry in lines like

> Bright bars explode against the dark's embraces . . .
> When he was hit, his body turned
> To clumsy dirt before it fell . . .
> The sun carousing in his either eye . . .

His images are sensitive and accurate. Snow comes down "like moths / Burned on the moon"; yawns turn the dancer's face "Into a little wilderness of flesh." But his imagery seems to be dominated by his rhythms, they come first. The strength of fully developed metaphor is sacrificed to a co-ordination of rhythm and idea which, when it is successful, results in a poetry of "good poems," rather than of "good lines" or striking images. The poem "Lightness" is a good example of this co-ordination, and of Wilbur's method in general.

The poem begins

A birdsnest built on the palm of the high-
Most bough of an elm, this morning as I came by
A brute gust lifted-and-left in the midst of the air;
Whereat the leaves went quiet, and there
Was a moment of silence in honor of
The sweetness of danger . . .

The birdsnest [*sic*] floats safely to earth, a "Triumph of lightness!" And now lightness is re-created in terms of "Aunt Virginia," who was

in her gay shroud
As vague and as self-possessed as a cloud . . .

Her husband, seeing her as such, thinks

Of the strange intactness of the gladly dying.

Thus, a new look at lightness, assisted by dactyls and run-on lines.

Wilbur uses a variety of forms skillfully, some, as the jacket uniforms [*sic*] us, "intricate, invented forms." In a few of these poems, however, the chosen form seems to be slightly inconsonant with the subject-matter. In "Mined Country," for instance, the light rhythms and light rhyme-scheme seem to obstruct the full emotional impact promised in

Danger is sunk in the pastures, the woods are sly . . .
Sunshiny field grass, the woods floor, are so mixed up
With earliest trusts, you have to pick back
Far past all you have learned, to go
Disinherit the dumb child . . .

"Water Walker" is not completely successful for similar reasons. This is, however, to judge these poems on the level of their own technical accomplishment, which is considerable.

Wilbur's wit, which is delightful, must be mentioned, if only to furnish an excuse for quoting the first stanza of "The Walgh-Vogel":

More pleasurable to look than feed upon,
Hence unconserved in dodo-runs, the round,
Unfeathered, melancholy, more than fifty pound
Dodo is gone . . .

"Tywater," "My Father Paints the Summer," "Grace," "Lightness," and "The Beautiful Changes" are sensitive and intelligent lyric poems with a distinctive and original touch, and such lyrics are very rare indeed. And so are lines as good as

The dancer kneeling on nothing
into the wings.

This is an unusual first book.

John Ashbery "Waltz King"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.4: 12. No publication date is given for this issue. The cover designates this the "Winter Issue." The Harvard University Library stamped it as received "March 11 1948." Since this issue follows the CXXXI.3 (December 1947) issue and precedes the CXXXI.5 (March 1948) issue, it was very likely published in either January or February 1948.
Composition: The only MS of this poem at Houghton is dated September 1945. File: "Waltz King" from Box 30.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

WALTZ KING

Roses whirled up from the south.
The bloody mouth
Soaked in the profitless kiss
Cannot answer for this.

Subtle the flute and drum
Troubling the parquet.[27]
Numb the cramped spectre
In the cobbled market.

There are ten girls in Vienna
Dressed for a ball.
There are ten graves in a row
As the leaves fall.

More do not ask
Nor take to task
Justice when the blade falls
As at twelve all unmask.

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[27] **Parquet**. "Part of the auditorium of a theatre, the front part of the ground-floor nearest the orchestra, or sometimes the whole of it. Chiefly *U.S.*" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

Kenneth Koch Review of Spearhead

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.4: 21-22. No publication date is given for this issue, but it was very likely published in either January or February 1948. See the textual headnote to Ashbery's "Waltz King" (above) for details.
Composition: The literary anthology Spearhead: 10 Years' Experimental Writing in America was published in 1947 by New Directions in New York. Koch must have written his review in 1947 or early 1948.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: The table of contents lists Kenneth Koch as a book review author, but the piece itself, appearing on pages 21-22, is unsigned.

SPEARHEAD, New Directions, $5.00.

The temptation to go off on a semantic excursion on the word "experimental" is great when one is confronted with Mr. Laughlin's "survey of the significant experimental and advance guard writing in the United States during the past decade." Wallace Stevens has said that "All poetry is experimental," and it does seem that experiment is involved in the very nature of literary creation; Laughlin's "technical" definition of experimentation is strange, but fortunately malleable enough to cover many examples of the most stimulating writing being done today. It may also have something to do with certain peculiar omissions and some poorly chosen inclusions. Mr. Laughlin's argument that Wallace Stevens, for instance, is a less "experimental" poet than Karl Shapiro and Josephine Miles is mysterious; and, again for instance, the selections from Patchen are not representative of his best work, except for the beautiful "The Character of Love Seen as a Search For the Lost."

Whatever the reason, Paul Goodman does not get as much critical and popular attention as he deserves. He is the complete master (and the only one, so far as I know) of *manic* prose, a complete obsession with, and delight in, the *particularity* of any experience, any thought--a *joy* in the situation that allows him to develop it in any and all directions. The reader never has, with Goodman, that appalling sensation that the author is slowly being crushed to death by the "profundity" of his theme; if Goodman finds a symbol, he laughs at it; he has made the uncommon discovery that laughter doesn't make any difference, it doesn't invalidate; rather, it is a way to freedom. Of his stories in this volume "The Facts of Life" is the best, and certainly a classic treatment of anti-semitism. John Berryman's story, "The Imaginary Jew," is a quite different and equally effective treatment of the same theme; here the emphasis is on the inevitable involvement of each individual in the guilt manifest in a fantastic social sentiment. H.J. Kaplan, in his excellent story, "The Mohammedans," extends the basis for our guilt even further; the Negro, Wiley Bey, who becomes a Mohammedan and defies his draft board, is also guilty: he "chooses to withdraw from a society which is still capable of absorbing his values. To dissolve the City which grew . . . . corruptly, and which alone stands between us and the unending jungle."

Perhaps the best prose work in the book is the selection from Djuna Barnes' magnificent novel, *Nightwood*, the chapter entitled "Watchman, What of the Night?" Here the guilt, the terrible lack of control, and the irresistable [*sic*] pull toward involvement in human love are brilliantly examined by Dr. Matthew O'Connor. The other writers here represented are not so successful in treating the complexities of love. Maude Hutchins constructs a very female fantasy on the hypothesis that Julius Caesar had Oedipal difficulties with his Aunt Julia; Henry Miller's apparently automatic sex-life sends him into cosmic exultations; and Tennessee Williams presents an obscene one-act play with all the pride of an adolescent boy who has just discovered that some people get pleasure out of being hurt. In all fairness to Miller it must be stated that almost any excerpt from *The*

Tropic of Cancer would be superior to the fragment here presented which is an account of his mind and libido while in the service of the "Cosmodemonic" Telegraph Company.

Delmore Schwartz's story, "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," is original and fine; there is also a selection from his long poem, *Genesis*, and two distinctive lyrics. There is a fundamental seriousness and integrity in all of Mr. Schwartz's work that distinguishes it with a grace not to be found in the more clever verbal pyrotechnics of much contemporary verse.

The most exciting poetry is a section from William Carlos William's [*sic*] *Paterson*, a clear and passionate poem on the theme that "a man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving . . ." Williams shows in this poem a vigor in expressing and relating ideas, in combining intellect, metaphor, and music, that is unlike anything in contemporary poetry. Cummings, Shapiro, Pound, Marianne Moore, and Randall Jarrell are well represented. Kenneth Rexroth's long poem, "The Phoenix and the Tortoise," is interesting, but its extremely conscious intellectuality suffers by comparison with the excerpt from *Paterson*.

Jose Garcia Villa and Josephine Miles are here engaged in some fairly unnecessary esthetic sleight-of-hand, but the prize for unreadability must probably go to Anais Nin who is poorly represented with a labyrinthine prose piece called "The Labyrinth."

Parker Tyler contributes an unusual and perceptive piece of movie criticism, and George Mann a very funny satire on a Bolshevik beaurocrat [*sic*]. A section from Robert Penn Warren's early novel, *At Heaven's Gate*, is here, a beautiful example of the use of folk-speech as a dramatic limitation.

There are many more selections, too many for an individual examination of each one. If we consider only what is best in this book, what shows the widest and deepest sensibility and the best technical means to express that sensibility, we may agree with Mr. Laughlin's practical criterion for what is experimental writing and find that it does not contradict Stevens' statement at all; not only is all poetry experimental, but all that is *truly* experimental is poetry. This volume, then, may serve as an admirable introduction to some of the best writing by Americans in the last decade.

Frank O'Hara "O the Dangers of Daily Living"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.5 (March 1948): 8-9, 23. The cover designates this the "Spring Issue."
Composition: A MS version of this piece has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: Moss, Howard, ed., The Poet's Story (New York, NY: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1973).
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: This piece is signed "Francis O'Hara." I follow here the continually eccentric punctuation of the Advocate-printed version.

O THE DANGERS OF DAILY LIVING

George, I said, I hope never to see you again, and with that strode into the thickening dusk. It was April and the smoke of early twilight wreathed slowly around caretakers finishing up their grooming jobs for the day. Sad piles of refuse--papers, weeds, leaves, twigs, rotted blossoms--lay, dotting the park with malignance, putting a period to the day. I was glad of the approaching night. If anyone asked me two months ago who the oddest person I knew was I would have said Morris Morgan; I would have been wrong, it is George Rose. I shall never forget the night I met him.
MIRIAM: Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello Oh! Hello.
ME: Hello, Miriam. How nice of you to call me up. I could not get here sooner as I was in Florida with a cold. Who's here?
MIRIAM: Everybody. Just everybody. I don't know what Jake and I are going to do for liquor if they keep coming in. These throngs of people. I know I didn't invite them all.
ME: You invited me, Miriam.
MIRIAM: Yes, dear, I know.
GEORGE: I live upstairs. May I have a drink?
JAKE: Oh. I remember you. You're Lucius Maby, the diamond expert.
GEORGE: Yes, I am. How do you do. How do you do. How do you do.
ME: You have terribly strong hands.
GEORGE: Haha. Haha. Ha.
MIRIAM: I'm locking this door.
GEORGE: Just in time, wasn't I?
MIRIAM: No, you weren't, as a matter of fact.
JAKE: Have you met Fabian Dugan? Hello, Fabian.
ME: No, I haven't. Hello, Fabian.
MIRIAM: Hello, Fabian. How are you?
FABIAN: O K, Mimi. Just a touch of strep, but I've been gargling all day.
GEORGE: I had a friend once who died.
AGNES: Bobo! I haven't seen you since last christmas [*sic*] when you were drunk at my birthday party.
ME: Sweet! You remembered.
AGNES: I was so in love with you when I was twelve.
ME: Me, too.
AGNES: Fate tricked us, dear. Too young for sex, too old for friendship.
JAKE: This is Annabelle Leach. Say hello, Annabelle.
ANNABELLE: Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.
MIRIAM: How is your grandmother, dear?
ANNABELLE: She died a week ago.
MIRIAM: Oh.
JAKE: Another drink?
MIRIAM: Do you mean we have one or would I like one?

GEORGE: I have lots of liquor at my place. I have bitters and menthe and grenadine and kummel.[28]

JAKE: Let's go up to your place.

GEORGE: I'd really love to have you but let me go up first for a minute, and then you come up. In five minutes. What time do you have?

JAKE: Oh, we'll find it all right.

MIRIAM: He's the nicest man. Isn't he the nicest man, Bobo?

ME: No, he is not. Morris Morgan is.

MORRIS: Hello, Bobo.

ME: Hello, Morris.

MORRIS: Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

AGNES: So your name is Morris. I thought it was Lud.

MORRIS: Lud? Oh, no. Oh no.

AGNES: I could have sworn it was.

MORRIS: Oh, no. It's Morris.

AGNES: How nice.

MIRIAM: Are the five minutes up?

JAKE: Yes. Let's go.

FELICE: Let me come, too. My husband never takes me anywhere.

MORRIS: I think I'll come, too. And you won't mind if I bring my secretary, Knute Lipsk?

KNUTE: Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

MORRIS: He's sort of a business associate.

JAKE: I didn't know you were in business.

MORRIS: These stairs are terribly dark.

FELICE: I just saw something. It brushed past me.

MIRIAM: His apartment has a purple door. The maid said he must be artistic.

JAKE: Oh, he is. Terribly.

AGNES: What's your name again?

KNUTE: Knute.

AGNES: Oh. Mine's Agnes. I always used to say newt.

KNUTE: No. It's knute [*sic*].

AGNES: Yes. Isn't it.

FELICE: Do you suppose we'll ever get there? I'm scared. Frightened, I mean.

JAKE: Why?

FELICE: Ladies never get scared. They get frightened.

ME: I saw a wonderful painting once. It was called *Lady in a Frightened Lavatory*. Vermeer. Or somebody.

MORRIS: I had an aunt once who slept with him. He was dull.

MIRIAM: He paints divinely.

MORRIS: My aunt didn't think so. She just would say Vermeer is a dull tool from one end of the day to the other. She was jaded.

FELICE: My father knew your aunt. They met in Venice.

MORRIS: How nice.

FELICE: What was your aunt's last name?

MORRIS: Abercrinch. Boost-Abercrinch.

FELICE: What Boost-Abercrinch?

MORRIS: Agatha.

FELICE: Oh.

MORRIS: This reminds me of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

KNUTE: Why, Morris?

---

[28] **Kümmel.** "A liqueur, flavoured with cumin, manufactured in North Germany" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

MORRIS: Now don't copy this down. Because I always think of sex on stairs.
FELICE: How difficult.
ME: You're so odd, Morris.
FELICE: Who made that noise?
JAKE: It was a what.
FELICE: A what?
JAKE: I didn't see it.
MIRIAM: Have you been to Fisby's lately?
ME: No. I imagine you asked that for a purpose. You think I am breaking up their home. I am not. I like their children better than I do them. Platonically. Julius Fisby is a boor. Mitzi is a sweet girl when she's been resting. The two children, Hrothgar[29] and Bob, are very athletic. I had wished they might be brought up more normally. But I never once, not once, butted in. I minded my own business. They were not my children. Julius drank a good deal and Mitzi took to burlesque, but they were not my children. Afterward, when the house burned down, I did my best. I bedded them in the garden house for three years. But Julietta wanted to give teas there. She began to suspect me of having an affair with Mitzi and took to staying in the hedges all night to watch the garden house. Something had to be done. I did it. Mitzi and Julius are very happy now even though the children are miserable. I have minded my own business and Julietta no longer watches the garden house. I resent your questioning me.
JAKE: You might make an effort to be more polite, Bobo.
ME: You are all against me.
FELICE: I felt something. Near my groin.
MIRIAM: After all, Bobo, what good is a friend if you can't ask him questions?
AGNES: Some women are such cats.
MORRIS: Now girls.
KNUTE: Miss Janine Poisson once told me that stairs did things to her.
JAKE: Then or once?
KNUTE: I don't remember. Then, I think.
FELICE: OHH!
JAKE: Was it a what?
FELICE: No. It was a who.
MIRIAM: How odd.
JAKE: I wonder what the stairs did to her.
KNUTE: I didn't know her very well.
ANNABELLE: I've been thinking.
MIRIAM: Oh. We thought you'd stayed downstairs.
ANNABELLE: No. I've been thinking. There is something peculiar about this landing. I don't think the stairs are leading anywhere. Does anyone know where we are? Wait till I'm finished. I've been thinking. Who ever heard of a purple door? This is an illusion. I studied them in college. I have known for the past two flights that Felice is really Janine Poisson. I went to school with them both. She is feeling nothing. It is just her fixation.
MORRIS: Oh no it isn't.
KNUTE: Morris!
ME: I think you are all perfect beasts. I am going home.
FELICE: OHH!

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[29] The name of the King of the Danes, in whose hall Beowulf destroys the monster Grendel. O'Hara likely chose the name simply for its unusual sound and origin, thus thickening the disjunctiveness in his absurd playlet. Paired with "Bob," a familiar American name, "Hrothgar" seems an especially ridiculous choice of a name for a character. (Cf. R. W. Chambers, Beowulf, 3rd ed., Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1967).

And so it was that when George Rose came up to me in the park that April evening and asked me what time it was, I did not so much as look at my watch, but fled into what was soon to be the night.

John Ashbery "Song from a Play"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.6: 7. No publication date is given for this issue. The cover and the masthead designate this the "Commencement Issue." This issue follows the CXXXI.5 (March 1948) issue and precedes the CXXXII.1 (September 1948) issue. Commencement (graduation ceremonies) usually took place in May or June of each year at Harvard. The Harvard University Library appears to have stamped this issue as received May 3, 1948, though the final character ("8"?) in the date is nearly illegible. All evidence considered, it appears very likely the issue was published in April or very early May 1948.
Composition: The only MS of this poem at Houghton is undated. File: "Song from a Play" from Box 29.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: A heading precedes this poem as printed in the Advocate: "*Garrison Competition, Honorable Mention.*" The poem is apparently a song from Ashbery's Everyman: A Masque, a play performed in 1951 at the Poets' Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but never published (Kermani 71; cf. Allen, "A Short Chronology," The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara).

SONG FROM A PLAY

Roses stood among the pans
As the sick ejected bitter humors;
Lilies came and went like passions
On faceless private errands;
Somebody sent me an amorous
Skeleton clothed in geraniums
With a card signed "Compliments of Jerry".

What could we reply, with the green
Ripeness falling across us, and lovers
In vicious pursuit even through dreams
Unless death were a vital sac hidden
Under every leaf and erotic gesture,
Allowing excursions into peace, beyond
The locked joy of the moment?

But the yellow foliage that now
Is running to cover the planet's face
Is dead motion that goes on awhile
After the genital force has stopped.
And the departure of love does not
Happen on this planet, it is a kind of action
Not permitted by the imagination.

Frank O'Hara "The Unquiet Grave"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.6: 7. No publication date is given for this issue, but it appears to have been published in April or very early May 1948. See the textual headnote for Ashbery's "Song from a Play" (above) for details.
Composition: A MS version of this piece has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: The piece is signed "Francis O'Hara," but the author is listed as "Frank O'Hara" in the contributor's note. That note indicates also that O'Hara's previous Advocate piece--"O the Dangers of Daily Living"--"led to much controversial criticism, as we expect *The Unquiet Grave* also to do."

"The Unquiet Grave" was in fact reviewed by The Harvard Crimson (May 1, 1948). According to Gooch, the "student critic" judged that the story was "good, but not especially so, and certainly not controversial. The idea of the story, which seems to me exaggeratedly picturesque, is generally hidden behind a style which is floridly poetic. Perhaps this concealment is a good thing for the style is definitely the strong part of the piece" (Gooch, City Poet 123).

THE UNQUIET GRAVE

The head, with long snaky neck and flapping lips, fluttered in the wind, its florid leaves smiling and grinning in turn. Oh to be the sea when the spray hits the rock, tears at the lichen with razor-nails, bleeds the barnacles. He bit the world. He never shouted, ran, tripped, and clawed the sod.

Awakening never, I am buried on top of the earth, the air my tomb, this robin's shell my coffin. And rolling over, the earth slowly punched his back and the grass ran under the palms of his hands, those tactile fronds that flailed the wind on nights of black and branch-creaking tumult. Meant to skim the tops of trees and float the foam of waves, he beat the earth, his body thrusting to the sun: a sun worshipper. "Ho," the viking [*sic*].

But winter came early that year and the fall wind was imprisoned in fine smothering particles of snow before it could escape. He had died one day: he had watched the wind battle to drive the snow away and lose and fall to strangle in silent writhing heaves; he had rushed out, flopping his arms, to help, and he had died of pneumonia shortly after. And his father had said to his sobbing mother, "Perhaps it is all for the best. He never was quite right . . . ," and she had hated his father ever since.

They buried him in a white coffin too like the snow, because he was young and thin. He had died in fighting and he was unhappy dead in the snowy box with the nails keeping out enough air so that none stirred in memory along his senseless flesh. Too little air: he rotted slowly. He was not any more, but he had been; his mother had what he had been and knew that it was too slow and too unhappy even for a corpse. "My son," his mother would say, pouring tea; "it is too slow. If only we had burned him." And the neighbors shuddered and left her. Sometimes the wind sang of him, "My slowly rotting friend . . . ," but only when the maddening moon was full and reaching for the mother, who saw at these times, by the light of the moon's anticipation, the acts that she must do.

So they killed the father, she and the smithy to whom she had gone in the spring and lain for by the forge and bellows; the fire had blared the smithy's lust and the forge had thundered his lunges; driven by the lash of her son's rotting misery and the prod of her lover's iron rage she had beaten the father's head with the smithy's hammer and thrown him from the cliff to dice on the rocks below. She lived under her son's calling, the moon's surmise, scraped by the smithy's wiry hairs and pummeled by his angry passion. The wind and rain pounded on her roof and crashed in her windows no matter the weather. And when the smithy drank and beat her she fought back to exite [*sic*] him, crying, "My child, my child, my mad little one, . . ." over and over until he had her, sobbing, on the floor.

The spring's flowers were an intrusion and withered in her yard, glad to be gone; she, seeing them dead, trampled the flowers growing on her son's grave.

Once a month the moon's roundness swelled her until she burst to the bleached shadows of the woods, racing to the cliffs in tempo with the dashing surf. On the rocks she would build a fire and, dancing to the wind, throw her clothes piece by piece to burn, until the dawn, chilling the fire, moved her to start home, the dew settling over her as she went. And she would stop in nests of briars to roll her moist body and mutter intimacies of the night of her only conception until her skin was netted with lacerations and her hair curried by the thorns. On these nights the smithy would drink himself to stupor so not to see her sneak bleeding to the house, crawling under the agony of the day.

She never faltered as she had in raising her son. She acted before she thought. She never spoke, but screamed and laughed and whined. The smithy's sanity, stayed by his lust for her frenzied flesh, selfishly kept her alive and caged in the house where her husband was not remembered.

But one moon-night on the cliffs, her fever weakened by a year, she slipped on the seaward side of the fire and fell naked down the rocks, halted mid-way by a gash. The sea sucked her pouring blood until she died at sunrise, and until sunrise the wind ravished her body and hurried her blood down the rock, while she laughed, "My child, my child," dying his death and hers on the rich red rock. And the smithy forged a foetus and a hammer for her grave.

Kenneth Koch "Entr'acte for a Freak Show"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.6: 11. No publication date is given for this issue, but it appears the issue was published in April or very early May 1948. See the textual headnote for Ashbery's "Song from a Play" (above) for details.
Composition: The date of composition has not been ascertained. Koch's Garrison Prize MS, among the holdings of Harvard University Archives, includes a version of this poem. Among the Ashbery Papers at Houghton Library, there is a file of several leaves entitled " 'Harvard Set' poems -- JA & Kenneth Koch' " from Box 28; the eighth leaf has another MS version of "Entr'acte for a Freak Show."
Anthology Publication: Culler, Jonathan, ed., The Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1966); Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977); McIntyre, Douglas A., and Karen S. Hull, eds., The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1987).
Further Publication: None. Despite the popularity of the poem--evident in its prize-winning and frequent anthologization--Koch never reprinted it in any of his own collections.
Notes / Emendations: A heading precedes this poem as printed in the Advocate: "*Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize*." Textual variants: the Garrison Prize MS reads "that" rather than "That" after the colon in the third line of the third speech.

ENTR'ACTE[30] FOR A FREAK SHOW

THE MAN WITH THE IRON MOUTH: See how
the light-bulb powders on my tongue:
Miraculous.

THE HUMAN FROG: No more than a mockery,
A trade you learned, as useless as a lung
Without a body. Rather gaze on me:
My shrunken body utterly depends
Not on a trick, but birth; this should delight
By making nightmare solid for you, friends,
So that, undressing in your homes tonight,
Your undeniable symmetry will mean
The terror was unreal that made you cry:
For you are you, and with your eyes have seen
The twisted proof that figures do not lie.
I am a thing of God.

THE MAN WITH THE IRON MOUTH: My
vulgar friend
Disdains me for my intellect, but this
Alone can set you free: That I defend
Absurd perfection, happily dismiss
All other kinds of action, must console
All you good people gathered in this place
Who feel your hands go empty and your whole
Body tremble, suddenly meet the face
Of your own childhood, when sleep will not bring
Its usual peace, reminding you of love

---

[30] **Entr'acte**. "A performance in music, dancing, etc., taking place between the acts" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

And what you have not been; remembering
My serious diet of glass, you can remove
The vision with a smile, sane and sincere,
Clenching your fists.

THE HUMAN FROG: You speak of things that seem.

THE BEARDED LADY: Gentlemen, you both lie.
    Confess me here
The twice tormented mirror of your dream.

John Ashbery "Why We Forget Dreams"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.1 (September 1948): 8.
Composition: One MS of this poem at Houghton has "4/48" written in pencil in the lower right corner, likely indicating a composition date of April 1948. Another MS in the same file gives a date of May 1, 1948. File: "Why We Forget Dreams" in Box 30.
Anthology Publication: Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977); McIntyre, Douglas A., and Karen S. Hull, eds., The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1987).
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: The Advocate reads "Swans"in the first line of the third stanza, and "forgetten" in the sixth line of the same stanza. All three of the MS versions of this poem at Houghton read rather "swans" and "forgotten," and I emend accordingly.

WHY WE FORGET DREAMS

I.

Through the half open door came a sound of April--
But I'm sad, said the tenor, O unwisely the spring
Piles up its dangerous architecture!
Who expects wisdom from lightheaded birds
Moving through a forest of constant desires,
A world continually budding and fading,
Where only death flowers and is exact
And the season of love will never happen?
The sun went out, the noise of his crying
Fell across the year like an icy rain.
Who can make his sorrow or his happiness real,
Or make of their changing a beautiful thing?

II.

Now, he said, it is all over; only
Someday, crossing a street, or innocently
Pulling on our gloves, the will
Of an unseen lover will stare us into silence:
In the sky, palladian,[31] or the waving
Tips of the willow, his sudden song
Will confound us, for it shall be noiseless and wordless;
The sky of his coming, dreamless, and we
The ghosts of which a dreamer takes possession.

So today, the swans in the public gardens
Carry his sentence from shore to shore
Yet we sit in the sun with our legs dangling
And my knowledge black and cold beneath.

---

[31] **Palladian**. "Of, belonging to, or according to the school of the Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1518-80), who imitated the ancient Roman architecture without regard to classical principles." Though apparently spelled with an initial capital "P" most often, the O.E.D. gives an instance from 1796 which uses the lower case (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

To move, he said, in his definition
Peaceful as swans! As in a poem
Love is forgotten, and in a dream
The poem is lost in a desert of contexts,
So motion is our cure, but till he names us
Love can be only waking to each other;
I to the blinding nowhere of your limbs,
You to the sad spring lost in my stammerings.

Frank O'Hara "Not with a Bang . . ."

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.1 (September 1948): 9, 26.
Composition: A MS version of this poem has not been located, nor has its date of composition been ascertained.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: The piece is signed "Francis O'Hara." The frequent lack of question marks--in places where the reader might expect them--is the Advocate's, and I follow.

NOT WITH A BANG[32] . . . .

Angela Symington put on her tightest black cocktail frock, a satin, and slunk across her room to the mirror on the back of the bathroom door. She turned to stroke the seams of her stockings into straight lines up the backs of her calves, then faced the mirror; she pushed her pelvis forward, tilted her head back and smiled at her self. "Well, baby," she said. "Well."

Christy's was only half filled when Angela went in. She looked around coldly as if she had a date waiting for her, then stalked to a little table in the rear. She shed her little black monkey-fur cape and draped it over the back of her chair so that the lining made a ribbon of red behind her dress. She looked impatiently at the door a few times.

"Hello, there," a tall heavy man with oily black hair said. He bent over her.

"Hello."

"Wouldn't you like a drink?"

"I've ordered one."

"No you haven't. The boy hasn't been near you."

"Oh?"

"Would you sue for assault if I sat down?"

"I might."

"O.K."

"You know you'll just have to get back up when my date arrives."

"That's all right."

"Yes. It will serve him right for being late."

"My name's Fred Lutely."

"Hello, Fred."

"Well?"

"Angela."

"Angela?"

"Symington."

"Nice."

"Thanks."

"What are you drinking, Angela?"

"Bourbon and ginger."

"Two bourbon and ginger."

---

[32] The title almost certainly alludes to the last quatrain of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men," first published in 1925:

> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *Not with a bang but a whimper.*

“I’m not flattered.”

“Right. Make it one bourbon and ginger and one scotch and water.”

“So?”

“Man of action.”

“How nice for you.”

“I’m not selfish.”

“Don’t get fresh.”

“All right.” He lit a cigarette for her. “Come here often?”

“Sometimes.”

“Yes. It’s a nice place.”

He stared at her through the smoke she puffed at him. He squinted as it reached his eyeballs. “Are you a model?”

“No and I’m not six years old either.”

“All right. What do you do?”

“I work for a living.”

“So do I. Another drink.”

“Yes.”

“Same. Where were we?”

"Yes. So were you if I remember."

“You were working for a living.”

“I work at Grodon’s. I sell dresses to youthful matrons.”

“I sell, too. Bonds.”

“How nice.”

“No, but it keeps me in socks.”

“I imagine it does.” Her hand eluded his.

“Look. Now that were [*sic*] acquainted let’s go somewhere and dance.”

“My date, remember?”

“How long are you going to wait?”

“As long as it takes.”

“Going steady?”

“No. Just patient.”

“You think he’s worth it.”

“I wouldn’t wait if I didn’t.”

“No, I don’t suppose you would.” He lit her cigarette. “And if he doesn’t show at all?”

“I’ll be a little annoyed.”

“Annoyed enough to let me take you home?”

“Possibly.”

“Good. I’ll wait. If it’s all right.”

“Remember I said possibly.”

“Yes.” He caught her hand. “Drinking the same?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me about yourself.”

“That’s my line isn’t it?”

“It should be. But you don’t follow the script, do you?”

“I don’t like scripts.”

“You don’t need one.”

“You ad lib rather well yourself.”

“Thanks.” His thumb smoothed a wrinkle in her glove. “Why don’t you take this off?”

“I might catch cold.”

“Have it your way. Another?”

“All right.”

A woman in a large black coat came to the table. “Angela. How are you?”

"Hello, Doris. Have you seen Roger anywhere? I was to meet him here."

"Roger? No. No, I haven't."

"Sit down a minute. This is Fred Lutely."

"Hello. No, I haven't seen Roger in ages. How is he?"

"Fine. What have you been doing lately? I expected to see you at May Bertage's Cocktail [*sic*] party the other day."

"She didn't ask me. Ever since I started to go out with Bob Goldman."

"Jealous?"

"Like a tigress. Without any young."

"Well god knows it's her own fault if she's childless." Angela withdrew her hand from the man's, removed her glove, and then put her hand back on the table near his. She felt the moisture on his palm as it covered her hand. "What are you drinking?" he said to Doris.

"Bourbon and ginger. Thanks. Have you seen Maurice Dent, Angela?"

"No. I thought he was out of town."

"He came back this week. From Florida and looks divine. All brown and gold."

"I hate blonde men."

"Oh but this one, Angela."

"Well. Yes. I suppose."

"Of course Sue has him. She almost flew down to meet him."

"I'll bet she could have."

"She is dreadful, isn't she? Well, I really should run along."

"Don't go. Here comes Christine. Christine. Hello."

"Hello, Angela. Hello, Doris."

"This is Fred Lutely. Christine Flendou. Sit down for a minute, Chris. I haven't seen you in ages."

"Well, just for a minute."

The man got up slowly. He came around the table and bent over Angela. "You bitch," he said.

He waited.

Angela smiled down at her cigarette. Then she raised her head until her forehead touched his lips. The other girls returned her smile. "Grease-ball," she said.

John Ashbery "Grandma"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.2 (November 1948): 11. The cover designates this simply the "November Issue, 1948."
Composition: Only one of the several MSS of this poem at Houghton gives a date, and that is July 11, 1947. File: "Grandma" from Box 28.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

GRANDMA

(D. 1947)

Death exposes the raptures of each instrument.
In the waltzing orchestra of the dead
His pulse is tempo, and each lapsing head
Fixed in the flood-tide of his rayed intent.

How they go under and under, forcing
Sayings of the tulip, black-eye susan, bone extending
Lace of arpeggios beyond the deaf ear, anything
Taken as a fugue, and no theme of their choosing.

John Ashbery "Some Trees"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.5 (March 31, 1949): 10.
Composition: Of the three MS versions of this poem at Houghton only one is dated, and that is November 16, 1948. File: "Some Trees" from Box 29. John Shoptaw in his book On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry states this poem was written November 8, 1948, but does not indicate his source (22).
Anthology Publication: Hall, Donald, ed., Contemporary American Poetry 2nd ed., (London, England: Penguin, 1972); Ollier, J.S., H. Mosher, Jr., and J. Rodgers, eds., American Literature: an Anthology II. 1912-1972 (Paris, France: Hachette [c1973]); Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977); Vendler, Helen, ed., The Harvard Book of Contemporary Poetry (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P at Harvard UP, 1985).
Further Publication: Ashbery, Turandot and Other Poems (1953); Ashbery, Some Trees (1956); Ashbery, Selected Poems (1985).
Notes / Emendations: The Advocate reads a semi-colon after "amazing" in line one. I emend this to a colon, since all the MS versions at Houghton have this, and the syntax seems to call for it. I similarly emend line five, supplying the second comma, since all MSS at Houghton have it, and the syntax seems to call for it.

The first two lines of the third stanza read thus in the MS versions at Houghton:

> To tell us we are;
> That their merely being there

I have, however, decided to retain the Advocate's reading, since it seems unlikely a printer's error, and thus plausibly Ashbery's own revision at the time.

After considerable deliberation, I have decided to retain the Advocate's reading of "a summer morning" in the first line of the concluding stanza. Though all MSS of the poem at Houghton and all future publications of the poem in Ashbery's own collections read "a winter morning," it seemed to me plausible that Ashbery had revised the line to read "a summer morning" for the initial Advocate publication, and had later reversed his decision. A glance at Ashbery's early manuscripts show that this sort of revising and re-revising was not alien to his writing practises at the time. (Cf. the textual headnote for "Elegy" above.) Further, the change does not seem likely the printer's. Hence I regard it as plausibly authorial.

SOME TREES

These are amazing: each
Joining a neighbor, as if speech
Were a still performance.
Arranging by chance

To meet as far, this morning,
From the world as agreeing
With it, you and I
Are suddenly what the trees try

To tell us we are;
That our merely being here
Means something; that soon
We may touch, love, explain.

And glad not to have invented
Such comeliness, we are surrounded:
A silence already filled with noises,
A canvas on which emerges

A gathering of smiles, a summer morning.
Placed in a puzzling light, and moving,
Our days put on such reticence,
These accents seem their own defence.

John Ashbery "For a European Child"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.6 (April 1949): 7. The cover designates this the "Commencement Issue."
Composition: Of the five MS versions of this poem at Houghton, only one is dated, and that is July 13, 1947.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.

FOR A EUROPEAN CHILD

In the park I saw the childlike lovers
Lie down on the newsprint where your quiet face
Blossomed in a famine knowing no appetite.
The conceit, pulled tight as a mask across

The obvious bone, altered but could not hide
Love's aching premise. Was it our wish to fail, that fanned
Copies of your shadow across our feasting land,
Published a face no mirror would understand?

The diplomats sulk and stammer; you personify
Your hunger in silence, and will grow to manhood
A sallow abstraction. Then your photograph
Will flare in the sky over this sensual wood

And no birds mating call from bough to bough
And no lovers struggle to image in each other
Their unspeakable desires, each turning, rather,
Inward for that definition, as you do now.

---July 1947

Frank O'Hara "The Drummer"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.1 (September 1950): 9. The cover designates this the "Registration Issue."
Composition: Donald Allen suggests the poem was "[p]robably written in 1949 or 1950" (Collected Poems 519n).
Anthology Publication: Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977); McIntyre, Douglas A., and Karen S. Hull, eds., The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1987).
Further Publication: O'Hara, The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, Donald Allen, ed., revised ed., (1971; Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1995).
Notes / Emendations: Textual variant: Allen's Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara reads "coupé" rather than "coupe" in the first line of the last stanza.

THE DRUMMER

Baraban![33] baraban! this is a quick
stiletto bounced tight in tin casket!
The devil you say! Wicked the way
my aunt had to tell me after uncle
rolled over and over inside the locomotive
bellowing like a walrus's guffaw!

Baraban! Tighten till it pricks through
keen as a blond feather, the saint!
the rib-tickler oh! oh! the dromedary
sharp-tooth, swaying its all-muscle belly,
has all the luck. What a whale! it careens
over the tracks, dropping bison cakes.
That's the way it was on the prairies,
with a baraban! every two minutes and
the red men knocking us off like turkeys.

Oh uncle, you died in a roadster coupe
fighting the Pawnees[34] and Banshees,[35] you did,
and I'll drum you over the hill, bumpily,
my drum strongly galumphing, kangaroos
on all sides yelping baraban! for you.

---

[33] **Baraban**. "Double-headed drum of the eastern Slavs (the Ukraine, Belorussia and western regions of Russia). It is used at wedding ceremonies and for dance accompaniment. In the 16th and 17th centuries it was also a military instrument" (The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, ed. Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan Press, 1984).

[34] **Pawnee**. A member of the group of tribes referred to as the Pawnees, which inhabit the Southwestern United States (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

[35] **Banshee**. "A supernatural being supposed by the peasantry of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands to wail under the windows of a house where one of the inmates is about to die. Certain families of rank were reputed to have a special 'family spirit' of this kind" (O.E.D., 2nd ed., 1989).

Frank O'Hara "Poem"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.1 (September 1950): 9. The cover designates this the "Registration Issue."
Composition: Donald Allen reports that this poem is dated "Cambridge, February 1950" in MS 312 in the Frank O'Hara archives (Collected Poems 519n).
Anthology Publication: Porter, Arabel J. et al., eds., New World Writing, (New York, NY: New American Library, 1952); Williams, Oscar, ed., The Pocket Book of Modern Verse, 3rd ed., revised by Hyman Sobiloff, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972); Smoley, Richard M., ed., First Flowering: The Best of the Harvard Advocate (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977); McIntyre, Douglas A., and Karen S. Hull, eds., The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1987); Ellman, Richard, and Robert O'Clair, eds., The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, 2nd ed., (New York, NY: Norton, 1988); Robert Wallace, ed., "Poems to Consider" [a section of a chapter titled "Beyond the Rational: Burglars and Housedogs"], Writing Poems, 3rd ed., (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991); Hoover, Paul, ed., Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology, (New York, NY: Norton, 1994).
Further Publication: O'Hara, Meditations in an Emergency, New York: Grove P, 1957; O'Hara, In Memory of My Feelings: A Selection of Poems by Frank O'Hara, Bill Berkson, ed., (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967); O'Hara, Frank. The Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara, Donald Allen, ed., (New York, NY: Knopf, 1974); O'Hara, The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, Donald Allen, ed., revised ed., (1971; Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1995).
Notes / Emendations: Textual variant: Allen's Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara omits the comma preceding "Call" in the first line.

POEM

The eager note on my door said, “Call me,
call when you get in!” so I quickly threw
a few tangerines into my overnight bag,
straightened my eyelids and shoulders, and

headed straight for the door. It was autumn
by the time I got around the corner, oh all
unwilling to be either pertinent or bemused, but
the leaves were brighter than grass on the sidewalk!

Funny, I thought, that the lights are on this late
and the hall door open; still up at this hour, a
champion jai-alai[36] player like himself? Oh fie!
for shame! What a host, so zealous! And he was

there in the hall, flat on a sheet of blood that
ran down the stairs. I did appreciate it. There are few
hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest
only casually invited, and that several months ago.

---

[36] **Jai alai**. "A game of Basque origin played on a three-walled court in which a small hard ball is caught and thrown against the walls with a long, curved, wicker scoop (cesta) strapped to the player's arm. The game is usually played between two sides of one or two players each; the side that fails to catch and return the ball before it has bounced twice on the floor loses the point" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., 1975).

Frank O'Hara "Late Adventure"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.1 (September 1950): 10-11, 18-20. The cover designates this the "Registration Issue."
Composition: This short story was likely written between 1946 and 1948, then revised in the summer of 1950. See "Notes" below for details.
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: None.
Notes / Emendations: Alexander Smith's Frank O'Hara: A Comprehensive Bibliography quotes Frank O'Hara's 27 September 1950 letter to former Harvard classmate Lawrence Osgood: "I had no idea that the Advocate would print that story, I hadn't seen it since two years or three ago when it was written for John Ciardi's class and Don Hall asked me for it. This summer Dan[iel Ellsberg, then editor of the Advocate] asked me if I'd be willing to revise it for him and I said yes . . . I love the conversation Hugh had with himself in the middle, the best thing in it, real self-questioning!" (Smith 111).

The list of courses that Donald Allen includes as an appendix to Frank O'Hara's Early Writing lists John Ciardi only as teaching Frank O'Hara "Composition: Poetry" in his final academic year at Harvard, 1949-1950; the genre and year would seem to preclude that course from being the one to which O'Hara refers in his letter to Osgood. However, in his contribution to Homage to Frank O'Hara, John Ciardi states that he recalls teaching O'Hara freshman English and instructing him in more than one writing workshop. Allen's appendix lists O'Hara's instructors for freshman English as "Mr. Morrison and others" (149). It may be that Ciardi was one of the "others," and that O'Hara wrote the story in freshman English during the 1946-47 academic year, or it may be that O'Hara wrote the story in a Ciardi workshop not accounted for in Allen's list.

The inconsistencies in the spelling of "seaweed" and "sea-weed" are the Advocate's and I retain them. The lower-case "g" in "god" is also the Advocate's and I follow.

LATE ADVENTURE

Benditz had only painted a purple patch on the canvas, but he sat down on the floor as if he had completed something. "What's the matter, Gilo?" said Hugh.

"I'm bored is all," Gilo said. "I'm so god . . . ." He chewed his cigarette-holder and slanted it at a nostril. He took it out of his mouth and drew circles on his temple with the mouth-piece. "I'm getting gray."

"We all are. We're getting old."

"And sorry."

"Yes, and sorry." Hugh looked out the window. "Let's walk down to the beach."

"Yes."

The sea lay in the harbor like a spider lying on its back. The water was faintly brown with seaweed, and rickety stairways led up from it like spindly, segmented legs. On the seaward side, where there were no bluffs, there were no stairways, and the wind whirled in through the opening in the land to tear at the creaking stairways and stir the sluggish water.

Hugh and Gilo jumped to a rock surrounded by slowly circling water and sat down. Gilo took off his shoes and bathed his feet, catching sea-weed with his toes and bursting its little rubberish bubbles with his fingers. "You're too proper, Hugh," he said. "You're ever older than I am."

"When did you last hear from Mary?" Hugh said. Gilo had always thought him not young enough, not bohemian enough, not radical enough, all of them had, and it had annoyed him so that he would admit it aggressively without ever really believing it, without letting himself believe it, because it reflected on his artistic and political integrity, on his hatred of the bourgeois and the normal, and he was afraid to feel inferior to them in any of these things.

"She's fine."

"Oh." So she was gone. Gilo was probably better off without her. He suddenly wished he had not come down to see Gilo. It had nothing to do with Mary being gone from Gilo's life, from Gilo's youth, and from his own. Yes, it did have to do with Mary's being gone, this despair, because Mary was another page read and turned, another leaf fallen from the wintering tree.

"I may be leavng [*sic*] this place pretty soon."

"Where do you plan to go? Some place to pick yourself up and start in a new direction? Or do you mean to paint?"

"I may paint there or I may not. I don't imagine I'll have much time."

"I've been thinking of travelling lately. I'm so tired of places when I'm in them."

"I was thinking of Palestine."

Gilo had gone to Spain, too. And Hugh, the social dilettante, too socially minded to abandon himself to art and forget his responsibilities in bohemianism, had not. They'll win anyway, he had thought. There's no sense in getting your head shot off; there are few enough liberals in the world as it is. And then later he had known they wouldn't win, that Franco would win. It was as simple as that. No sense getting your head shot off either way: do more good right where you are. "Wonderful, Gilo. They certainly need help, god knows."

"Yes. I thought I'd finish things up here and then volunteer to serve on a ship smuggling refugees into Palestine until I can get in myself and join Haganah[37] or the Stern Gang."[38]

"The extremists?"

"You don't think they're justified?"

"I don't know. I suppose they are. It's rather ugly, though."

"Isn't it." Gilo got up and turned his back, then he bent and picked up his shoes and socks.

"Gilo. I'm going to Palestine, too. I've been thinking of it for quite a while now and I want to go."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I feel I should."

"Why? You aren't a Jew."

"You're not a Jew, either."

"I'm not not one."

". . . . . ."

"Sorry, Hugh." Gilo put on his socks and shoes. "Shall we go back up?"

"Yes."

"We can have dinner with Lucia and Bill and Nan."

"Fine. I'd like to see them." Hugh wished that he had stayed at home.

Once back in New York Hugh found that three weeks were plenty of time for a mildly successful novelist to wind up his affairs, sub-let his apartment, and attend a few parties. He had told only a few of his best friends of his plans and admonished them to secrecy, but he knew that his friends had not kept silence (there was that time at Charlotte's when he had overhead [*sic*] a matron he knew only by sight saying, "But Hugh Willmont's middle-aged, my dear! Well I mean. . . ."), and that most of the people he knew thought his forthcoming trip interesting and romantic: adventure might yet occur in their own lives, the rut was not inescapable. He found that putting his life away in moth-balls was not so hard to do as he had thought it would be, and that he was looking forward to new experience with an uncynical enthusiasm. He bought radical and liberal journals each day or so, and read them with a feeling of belonging he had never felt before. His former faint feeling of guilt was gone, and his impatience with what he had called "the visionary mind" had disappeared in his identification of himself with it.

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[37] **Haganah**, a moderate Zionist military organization that eventually became, by 1948, the national army of Israel. The Haganah "opposed the political philosophy and terrorist activities of the Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Group" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., 1975).

[38] **Stern Gang**, also known as Stern Group, "officially LOHAME HERAT YISRA'EL (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), militant Zionist organization in Palestine, founded 1940 by Abraham Stern after a split in the right-wing underground movement, Irgun Zvai Leumi . . . . After the creation of Israel (1948), the group, which had always been condemned by moderate leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine, was banned; some of its units were incorporated in the Israel Defense Forces." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., 1975).

After the first days of confusion Hugh had more leisure than he had had in years, and he was more in demand socially. People he knew only slightly remembered that they had intended to have him to cocktails or dinner some time ago and were eager to get around to doing it now. He finished one of a series of critical essays he had been doing for a small, unremunerative literary magazine, and let his other work go so he could spend most of his remaining time with Charlotte.

Charlotte, too, had changed toward him. He had not noticed until after her change how stereotyped and perfunctory their affair had grown. Their love had become a sort of reminiscent ritual which slightly bored both celebrants until the night he told her he would leave her soon. Beginning with that night she had re-bloomed for him; they had not been happier since the days when she first became his mistress. She would wait for him; she promised, and he was sure she would. His gesture had, perhaps, more significance in her eyes than in his heart.

Gilo Benditz joined him about a week before they were to leave for North Africa, and Hugh and Gilo went to exhibtions [*sic*] and recitals which Gilo had missed while he was painting in Provincetown. But after the first two days Gilo followed his own pursuits and Hugh his, for Gilo dampened by his matter of factness the adventure of Hugh's decision. Gilo even went so far as to suggest that Hugh might by now have reconsidered and might prefer not to go after all, a suggestion which Hugh found offensive. "Why should I have changed my mind?" Hugh said.

"I don't know. Because you have more to lose than I, perhaps."[39]

"Well, I suppose I have," Hugh said, and the following day was filled with depression.

Toward evening Charlotte called to say she had tickets for two at the symphony (they were doing a Schoenberg symphony that mustn't be missed) and would stay at home if Gilo wanted to go with Hugh. Hugh declined for Gilo.

Hugh and Charlotte arrived at the concert just in time for a Mozart symphony and after the Schoenberg, while they were having a cigarette in the foyer, Charlotte asked if he wouldn't like to do a rather strange party they'd both been invited to. Hugh, too depressed, decided to stay for the Bruch Concerto[40] and offered, if Charlotte was bored by concert war-horses, to meet her later at the party. She went back to their seats with him and the concerto began.

The violinist, a young boy with a lean, passionate, Jewish face, played the work with possessiveness and warmth. Charlotte leaned over once to whisper, "Pure schmaltz." but [*sic*] Hugh was affected from the first note of the violinist, and the cumulative emotional pressure overcame him during the second movement. Tears poured down his cheeks. He took out his handkerchief and pushed at his nose, but the last movement sent him into such turmoil that he could barely see the orchestra. His brain wallowed in sound and Charlotte's whispers were lost to him.

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[39] I have emended this passage to read as it now does. The Advocate reading makes little sense:

> "Why should I have changed more to lose than I, perhaps."
> "I don't know. Because you have my mind?" Hugh said.

Apparently the Advocate's typesetter simply exchanged two passages by accident: 'more to lose than I, perhaps' for ' "my mind?" Hugh said." '

[40] **Max Bruch** (1838-1920), German composer and conductor. Among many other works for voice, piano, and symphony, he wrote three violin concertos (Randel, comp., Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music).

When it was over he sat back limp. Noise seethed around him,--clapping, bravoes [*sic*], chatter. "What is it?" Charlotte was saying, "What is it?" He turned to her, dabbing quickly at his eyes. "Oh Hugh, dear, what is it?"

He stood up. "God damn it," he said too loudly. "Nothing. Nothing, Mother Hubbard," and walked away.

He got very drunk that night and argued unintelligibly with Gilo when he got back to the apartment early the next morning.

When he woke up it was afternoon. He got up and showered. When Gilo insisted there was nothing to apologize for. [*sic*] "It probably did you good," he said, but Hugh felt uneasy.

Hugh called Charlotte and apologized. "Of course I don't mind," Charlotte said warily. "You were just . . . . upset. He did play divinely, didn't he? I think everyone was affected by him. All right. I'll expect you."

Charlotte was preparing dinner for two when Hugh arrived. They had cocktails in silence. Hugh felt rested and relaxed, and during dinner embarked on an easy conversation which Charlotte gradually took part in, first cautiously, then sympathetically. After dinner they did the dishes together, and by the time they had moved into the living room for one more cup of coffee they had regained their affectionate relationship. Hugh waited for Charlotte to ask him to stay. She did. He showered; and after making love to her decided to stay with her all night.

The next morning Hugh called Gilo up and invited him over for breakfast. It was a sunny day and they ate in front of a large window so they could see the sun on the tree outside as they drank cup after cup of coffee. "I wanted to ask you both something," Charlotte said. "I've been thinking of giving a little party, a sort of going away affair without anyone knowing it's that--no sense in us all getting maudlin." Hugh knew that she rushed on to the next sentence because of this slip; he watched her to see if she would try to find out if he had noticed it. "Just a few old friends in and maybe something afterward if we don't feel like staying here."

"Nice of you to think of it, Charlotte," Gilo said, looking at Hugh.

Hugh didn't look at Gilo. "It's a little silly, Charlotte," he said. "But I suppose if you want to. . . ."

"When shall I have it?"

"Why not the night we leave?" Hugh said, dreading the night of farewell he would owe her if the party were given some other time. "There is nothing like a send-off from the pier to drive everyone completely hysterical. Remember that time Mary threw one before you sailed for Paris, Gilo?"

"Never forget."

"Then it's settled. Who do you want invited? Anyone special, Gilo?"

"No. It doesn't matter. I'll leave it up to you, Charlotte."

"And you, Hugh?"

"It's all yours, dear."

"I'll get busy on it then."

The party was a success. Charlotte invited too many people, served too much liquor, and everyone had a good time. Hugh drank in careful moderation and took care to avoid an emotional scene when he saw that Charlotte was getting high.

Gilo got quite drunk and reminisced about the Spanish Civil War. "We'll get that bastard yet," he threatened Generalissimo Franco's[41] safety, and fat, balding businessmen promised him support when the time came to invade and restore the Republic. One of the businessmen came up to Hugh and, away from Gilo's magnetism, said, "What will you lost-causers do if the Jews win out in this thing?" Hugh stared at the man's ugly smile as the question bobbed in front of him like a cork and then, luckily, disappeared in the eddy of conversation. "I said. . . .," but Hugh had fled.

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[41] **Francisco Franco (Bahamonde).** "A general and leader of the Nationalist forces that overthrew the Spanish democratic republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), [and] was after 1936 head of the

Soon it was time for them to leave. The party's members packed themselves into taxis and, hooting and hollering, emptied onto the dock for a few seconds of good-lucks; Charlotte wept profusely; they all stood and screamed after the ship as it got underway. Hugh and Gilo had gone below before they were out of sight.

The trip was dull. The small, dingy vessel would leave them at a North African port where they would be interviewed and placed on a Jewish smuggler by representatives of the Jewish underground organization whom they would contact upon going ashore. Their fellow-passengers were middle and low class Mediterraneans returning to their native lands from America, except for a missionary or two. They spoke English, with few exceptions, rather poorly, and, although Gilo had an amusing time with some of them, Hugh was bored by a series of socially pretentious businessmen who were the only people on board ship to approach him. Their conversation was invariably the same: how good it would be to see their relatives again, how proud the village would be of their success in America, how happy they were to be going home, how probable the rumour of a renegade German submarine was, how shocked they were to hear that the nice-looking old missionary had been transferred from South America for raping a Brazilian nun, how unfortunate it was that one of the little boys, travelling third class had caught the mumps, how sick all the passengers whose staterooms were on the port side had become as soon as the ship had got underway, how convenient it was that the management made available a prostitute who could be contacted through one of the stewards, how much they thought of the United States. And Hugh, with his perfunctory answers to their questions and inattentive listening to their conversational attempts, made himself a reputation for snobbery which was more than to any disapproval of them or their social milieu.[*sic*] He half-realized this, but was too depressed to really care. He decided that ocean voyages did not agree with him; he knew that he would feel better, more himself, when he reached land--he hated the barren, metal sea, the wheeling gulls and slithering porpoises, and longed for the smells of people and dirt and vegetation. The sun seemed damp to him on the clearest days, and he could stomach little food. His sleep was constantly broken by the awkward rhythm of the ship.

Upon reaching port Gilo and Hugh established themselves at a moderately comfortable hotel and presented themselves to the proper persons. They were greeted with enthusiasm and friendliness and immediately taken into the social life of the members of the Jewish organization who were unknown to the authorities, and therefore did not lead so precarious an existence as their brothers in the underground.

Hugh and Gilo had waited for assignment a little less than a month when Hugh became ill. He was admitted to a dirty, confused hospital run by French nuns and remained there for over a month with a serious attack of mumps. During this time he received two notes from Gilo, one explaining his reluctance to expose himself to the diseases of the over-crowded hospital when he might be called for duty any day, and the other, which came the second week of Hugh's confinement, notifying Hugh that he had been called and would leave soon.

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government of Spain . . . . Franco entered the army in 1907 and became a national hero for his role in campaigns against Moroccan rebels. By 1935 he was chief of the army's general staff. Political disintegration led Franco to join a military rebellion in 1936; he was named commander in chief of the rebel Nationalist government and won a complete victory on April 1, 1939.

"During World War II Franco's government remained neutral. At the height of the Cold War Franco took a position of strong anti-Communism. In the 1950s and '60s his harsh conservatism relaxed somewhat" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., 1975).

Hugh was still weak when he left the hospital but glad to move back to the hotel. The disease had left no ill effects but he would need a few weeks, at least, of convalescence. His Jewish acquaintances soon contacted him. Gilo had been smuggled out to a ship lying off the harbor the night of the day he had written to Hugh and by now, barring mishap, was delivering refugees somewhere along the coast of Palestine. They had cancelled Hugh's volunteer's registration when he was admitted to the hospital, and felt that he should wait till his full health was restored before re-registering.

Without Gilo he found it difficult to spend any length of time with these acquaintances, even though they attempted to entertain him and relax him. Gilo, he realized, had provided common ground which, without him, he was at a loss to establish. Gradually he stopped seeing anyone, and spent his time reading or walking the beaches. He became anxious to do something, but the doubt of his ability to accomplish his purpose without the aid of Gilo as a sort of social interpreter nullified his desire to accomplish it, and the knowledge that he was so dependent on someone, a situation which he had avoided even in such intimate relationships as that with Charlotte for fear that just what had happened to him now would happen, rendered him completely incapable of action.

The doctor finally settled the matter of his re-registration as an underground volunteer for him during one of his periodic inspections. "Just what are your immediate plans, Mr. Willmont?"

"Why . . . . I don't believe I have any immediate plans."

"Then I should suggest that you not plan anything which would be too strenuous, physically, Mr. Willmont. And furthermore although many people find our climate ideal for convalescence, I believe you might make greater progress in regaining your health if you were to live elsewhere. Perhaps a more temperate climate . . ."

"I see, doctor . . . . ."

That same afternoon he ordered reservations for New York. Honorably relieved of an obligation which he had up to now not allowed himself to admit had become unpleasant, he spent the few days of waiting in an enthusiastic spending spree; he bought oddities as souvenirs for his friends and toiletries for Charlotte which were unobtainable or fabulously expensive in the United States. For the first time he became aware that he had not even sent Charlotte his address. The day before he sailed he cabled her saying he was returning due to ill health, and wouldn't she meet the ship.

The second day at sea he received a cablegram from Charlotte. It was a long one: they had all been terribly worried about him and Gilo and would all be at the dock to meet him. They might even hire a band . . . .

He burnt the cablegram. He was physically incapable of facing them. He could not stand to see them all again. The ship began to make him ill.

Frank O'Hara "A Prayer to Prospero"

Copy-Text: The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.4 (February 1951): 11.
Composition: Donald Allen indicates that MS 305 in the Frank O'Hara archive dates this poem "Cambridge, November 1949" (Allen, ed., The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara 519n).
Anthology Publication: None.
Further Publication: O'Hara, The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, Donald Allen, ed., revised ed., (1971; Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1995).
Notes / Emendations: Textual variant: Allen's Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara has the article "the" preceding "motive" in line two.

A PRAYER TO PROSPERO

to David Hersey[42]*who*
created him for me

Our father[43] local and famous
you are motive forever
guide of our consciousness

towards you storms beckon
incident for moral proof
and abide by your decision

with you as upon an island
the beast the butcher and
the fool live harmonious

you are guardian of our
faculties and we owe you
what beauty we attain to

your kingdom always is
manifest in villains virgins
everything we understand

and hazard leads us to you
with its invisible voice
or destroys us apart alone

neglect us not now we are
free our need is difficult
strangers steal our voice

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[42] In his note to this poem in The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara, Donald Allen indicates that Frank O'Hara archive MS 305, dated November, 1949, has the dedication as "to Thayer David" (519n). From May 5th through May 21st, 1949, the Harvard Theatre Workshop put on a production of Shakespeare's play The Tempest at Brattle Hall (soon to be called Brattle Theatre) just off Harvard Square. The program for the production lists a "Thayer David" in the role of Prospero. It may be that Thayer David was a stage name for David Hershey, and that O'Hara ultimately preferred the birth name for his dedication. (I thank Professor Joe Dallett, Harvard College class of '51, for a photocopy of this program.)

[43] Compare this and other passages of the poem to the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-14; Luke 11:1-4).

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Chronological Checklist of All Publication in Periodicals of Ashbery, Koch, and O'Hara to 1953

Note: All pieces listed here are poems unless otherwise indicated. When a piece is untitled (or titled generically, e.g. "Poem") I provide, in square brackets, the first few words of the first line to aid identification.

I list the journal title first in each entry, followed by the pages and titles of whatever pieces (by any of the three poets) that are printed in the issue in question. This unconventional format has the advantage of allowing the reader to see certain publication patterns at a glance: it will be clear, for instance, how often the three poets appeared together in various periodicals in these early years. One will also notice how largely The Harvard Advocate figures in the poets' early publication record.

I believe the listings for all three poets should be nearly exhaustive. There exist comprehensive bibliographies dealing with the early publication careers of Ashbery and O'Hara--by Kermani and Smith, respectively--and I have consulted these extensively. While no major bibliographical study of Koch's work has yet been published, I did consult all entries listed in Vincent Prestianni's article, "Kenneth Koch: An Analytic List of Bibliographies," and also checked contributors' notes for many of Koch's earliest publications; these frequently had helpful indications of further publications by Koch; finally, I simply searched many of the other major and minor literary magazines of the period.

I was unable to locate several publications. In his Paris Review interview, Donald Hall refers to a poem that Ashbery wrote for The Harvard Advocate whose first line began, "Fortunate Alphonse, the shy homosexual . . . ." My microfilm copy of the issues from 1947 to 1951 appears not to contain this poem. In the September 1948 issue of The Harvard Advocate, Kenneth Koch's contributor's note indicates that "[Koch] will also have a group of poems in the *American Arts and Letters*, a new quarterly coming out this fall, edited by Anthony Harrigan." I have not located this periodical. Nor have I located the poems that Koch published (likely between 1946 and 1948) in Experiment and Pacific, two journals he lists on the Glascock Poetry Prize questionnaire as periodicals which had accepted his poems.

1943

--Deerfield Scroll, Deerfield, MA, XVIII.5 (11 December 1943): 2. **John Ashbery** Untitled [" 'A year will pass, and I shall learn' "].

1944

--Deerfield Scroll Deerfield, MA, XVIII.7 (12 February 1944): 2. **John Ashbery** "January Twilight."

--Deerfield Scroll Deerfield, MA, XVIII.8 (26 February 1944): 2. **John Ashbery** "Child's Penny-Bank."

--The University Review, University of Missouri at Kansas City, KS, XI.2 (Winter 1944): 109. **Kenneth Koch** "Physics Lecture."

1945

--Deerfield Scroll Deerfield, MA,XIX.5 (27 January 1945): 2. **John Ashbery** "A Ride on the Bus" [prose].

--Deerfield Scroll Deerfield, MA,XIX.12 (5 May 1945): 2. **John Ashbery** "Transformation."

--Deerfield Scroll Deerfield, MA,XIX.13 (19 May 1945): 2. **John Ashbery** "Reversal."

--The University Review, University of Missouri at Kansas City, KS, XII.2 (Winter 1945): 157. **Kenneth Koch** "Sunday."

--Poetry, Chicago, IL, LXVII.11 (November 1945): 66, 66-7; 80-81. **John Ashbery** "Poem" ["Though we seek always the known absolute"] and "Lost Cove." These poems were published under the name "Joel Michael Symington." **Kenneth Koch** "Poem for My Twentieth Birthday," "Ladies for Dinner, Saipan" and "The Trip from California."

1947

--The Harvard Advocate CXXX.1 (April 1947): 12. **John Ashbery** "A Sermon: Amos 8:11-14."

--Poetry, Chicago, IL, LXX.1. (April 1947): 17. **Kenneth Koch** "Schoolyard in April."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXX.3 (21 May 1947): 3, 4, 4, 5; 6, 6, 7. **Kenneth Koch** "Nocturn & Aubade," "Carnival," "Program Notes," and "In Answer to This Emptiness." **John Ashbery** "Elegy," "A Fable," and "The Perfect Orange."

--Voices [Special issue: Young poets], New York, NY, 130 (Summer 1947): 12. **John Ashbery** "Dark River."

--Quarterly Review of Literature, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, IV.3 (1947): 243. **Kenneth Koch** "Question in Red Ink."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.1 (October 1947): 9. **John Ashbery** "Point of Departure."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.2 (November 1947): 13-14. **John Ashbery** "Fete Galante" [short story].

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.3 (December 1947): 13; 28-30. **John Ashbery** "Berceuse." **Kenneth Koch** review of Richard Wilbur's first book of poetry, The Beautiful Changes.

1948

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.4 ([January or February 1948]): 12; 21-22. **John Ashbery** "Waltz King." **Kenneth Koch** Review of Spearhead.

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.5 (March 1948): 8-9, 23. **Frank O'Hara** "O the Dangers of Daily Living" [play].

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXI.6 ([April or May 1948]): 7; 11; 24. **John Ashbery** "Song from a Play." **Kenneth Koch** "Entr'acte for a Freak Show." **Frank O'Hara** "The Unquiet Grave" [short story].

--Poetry, Chicago, IL, LXXII.5 (August 1948): 244. **Kenneth Koch** "You Know All This."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.1 (September 1948): 8; 9, 26. **John Ashbery** "Why We Forget Dreams." **Frank O'Hara** "Not with a bang . . . ." [short story].

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.2 (November 1948): 11. **John Ashbery** "Grandma." (The cover art of this issue is a surrealistic collage attributed by the table of contents to "F. Amory and John Ashberry." In a conversation of March 5, 1996, Ashbery confirmed for me that he did indeed collaborate on this collage with Frederick Amory, a fellow Harvard student.)

1949

--Furioso, Northfield, MN, IV.1 (Winter 1949): 60, 61. **John Ashbery** "Friar Laurence's Cell" and "From a Diary."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.5 (March 31, 1949): 10. **John Ashbery** "Some Trees."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXII.6 (April 1949): 7. **John Ashbery** "For a European Child."

1950

--Poetry New York, 2 (1950): 23-4, 25. **John Ashbery** "The Dolors of Columbine" and "The Statues."

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.1. (September 1950): 9, 9, 10-11, 18-20. **Frank O'Hara** "The Drummer" and "Poem" ["The eager note on my door said, 'Call me,"], and "Late Adventure" [short story].

--Furioso, Northfield, MN, V.3 (Summer 1950): 50. **Kenneth Koch** "The Courtier."

1951

--The Harvard Advocate CXXXIV.4 (February 1951): 11. **Frank O'Hara** "A Prayer to Prospero."

--Generation, Ann Arbor, MI, II.3 (Spring 1951): 12, 12. **Frank O'Hara** "Women" and "Homage to Rrose Sélavy."

--Partisan Review, New York, NY, XVIII.4 (July/August 1951): [420-21]. **John Ashbery** "The Picture of Little J.A. in a Prospect of Flowers."

--Accent, Urbana, IL, XI.3 (Summer 1951): 174-75. **Frank O'Hara** "The Three-Penny Opera."

--Poetry, Chicago, IL, LXXIX. 3 (December 1951): 136-39. **Frank O'Hara** "Ann Arbor Variations."

1952

--Generation, Ann Arbor, MI, III.1 (Winter 1951 [i.e. 1952]): 45, 46, 46, 47. **Frank O'Hara** "Morning," "Interior," "Poem" ["If I knew exactly why the chestnut tree"], and "Concert Champêtre."

--Partisan Review, New Brunswick, NJ, XIX.2 (March/April 1952): 183-84. **Frank O'Hara** "On Looking at La Grande Jatte, the Czar Wept Anew."

--One Fourteen, New York, NY, VI.11 (December 1952): [1]. **John Ashbery** "Greetings, Friends!"

1953

--Folder, New York, NY, I.1 (Winter [i.e. Oct.] 1953): Unpaginated. **John Ashbery** "The Grapevine," "Errors," "White" and "The Way They Took." **Kenneth Koch** "Poem" and "Is Nothing Reserved For Next Year, Newlyweds on Arbor Day?" **Frank O'Hara** "Blocks" and "Commercial Variations."

--Art News, New York, NY, LII.8 (December 1953): 42-44, 63, 65. **Frank O'Hara** ["Reviews & Previews"] [prose].

An Interview with John Ashbery

by Michael Londry

What follows is an edited excerpt from an interview conducted in Professor Ashbery's Manhattan apartment on the afternoon of March 5, 1996. John Ashbery's letter of November 5, 1996, confirms the text of the interview for inclusion in this thesis.

LONDRY: May I ask what drew you to Harvard? Kenneth Koch recently mentioned to me that he'd been aware several great poets had gone to Harvard--T.S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, for example--and that he thought Harvard would be a good place for an aspiring poet to go.

ASHBERY: Well, there were two poets teaching at Harvard at the time. One was Theodore Spencer, with whom I took a poetry workshop in my freshman year--rather surprisingly, since there weren't such things as poetry workshops in those days, especially at Harvard--and they still, probably, have very few things like that. He was quite well known but he's been forgotten since then. He in fact died during my second year there, at the age of only forty I believe. And then Delmore Schwartz, whom I ended up never taking a course with, and I can't remember why I didn't, because I was very fond of his poetry. I think he occasionally would cancel his courses, and come back to New York on the spur of the moment. He was a bit of an unstable person.

But I probably would never have thought of applying to Harvard had it not been for some friends of my grandfather, who was a professor of physics at the University of Rochester. He had a former student who was teaching physics at Harvard, and he and his wife came to visit. His wife's parents lived next door to my grandparents and they knew each other. Her father had also been a professor at the University of Rochester. I remember saying "I don't know where to apply to college" and they said "Why don't you try Harvard?" and I thought "That's interesting, never thought of Harvard." My grandfather was hoping that I would go to the University of Rochester, because he had been a student there and then had taught for 40 years in the Physics Department. But I didn't want to go there. Luckily I didn't. I wanted to get away from home. Also I liked the idea of living in a big city like Boston, which I'd never done before.

LONDRY: What drew you to The Harvard Advocate? You decided quite early on to try out for the board, which had an annual competition to select new members.

ASHBERY: Obviously I would have been attracted to a literary magazine if only as a place to try to get my poems published. The Advocate had been closed for several years and it reopened, I believe, in the fall of 1947. That was when I met Kenneth Koch, and we showed each other our poems. He was very enthusiastic about mine, and I liked his very much. That was really the first time I'd known somebody else who wrote poetry. He told me I should try out for the Advocate editorial board and he was influential, I guess, in getting me on it.

LONDRY: Could you describe the competitions for editorial positions at the Advocate? Were these ferocious events where friends had to stick up for other friends to get them on the board, or were they fairly prosaic meetings?

ASHBERY: No, I think they were pretty keen competitions. As I recall, a lot of people wanted to be on the board. I remember that in the year I applied the editor-in-chief was a Mexican, Antonio Haas. Actually he and I became very good friends, and I'm still in touch with him. And there was somebody from Alabama or Mississippi who was also on the board. These people addressed us all as aspiring Advocate editors and then Antonio said "Well, is there anything we haven't told them?" and Kenneth said "Yes, I think you should explain you don't need a funny accent to get on the board!" [laughs]

LONDRY: You didn't need an Alabaman or Mexican accent?

ASHBERY: Right! I remember also. . . or, I don't remember this actually--I mean, we're talking 50 years ago, of course--but Donald Hall told me, some years ago, that after I became an Advocate editor and was one of the judges of these aspirants, Daniel Ellsberg--one of the people who eventually leaked the Pentagon Papers to the press--was apparently coming out for the Advocate. After the aspirants went away I said "We can't possibly have him. Did you see the tie he was wearing?" [laughs] I don't think I was ever as ... as dandyish as that makes me sound, but Donald Hall insists I said that.

LONDRY: In City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara , Brad Gooch mentions a couple of events at Harvard that frightened some people: a black man who was discovered necking with a white man in the library was kicked out of college; and there was a scandal involving two men in Eliot House, which eventually resulted in a suicide attempt. Could you speak for a moment about what the atmosphere and the attitude towards homosexuality was at Harvard, and in America at that time? Did the attitudes prevalent at the time have a play at all in how you or Frank O'Hara felt being at Harvard?

ASHBERY: Yes, being homosexual was grounds for being expelled from Harvard. On the other hand, there were obviously--as at any university--a lot of homosexuals who felt more or less at home there as compared to the heartland of America. I suppose the feeling there would have been anti-homosexual, though perhaps not as vociferous as it is today because it was much less visible then. Today's atmosphere of gay militancy provokes a strong reaction from the right wing, as you know.

LONDRY: According to Brad Gooch's biography, Frank O'Hara leaned to the left politically during his Harvard days. Would you say that you or Kenneth Koch were allied with any political forces at that time?

ASHBERY: No, I don't think so. We were apolitical--although certainly more inclined towards the Democratic party than the Republican party. And I don't myself remember what Frank's political stance was. I don't remember ever discussing politics with him, although it's possible that we did and I've forgotten.

LONDRY: Were you inspired or impressed by any of your instructors at Harvard other than the ones you've already mentioned? You were attracted to Schwartz, but you didn't actually take a course from him, and you enjoyed your course with Spencer.

ASHBERY: Yes, F.O. Matthiessen. I took his course in modern American poetry my last year at Harvard, and that was a very good experience. I of course had already read most of the people who were covered in the course, but in fact I'd never really read Stevens very closely, and that was when I began to do so. I wrote a paper on him actually; perhaps you've uncovered it.

LONDRY: I haven't actually. I'd heard of it, but didn't see it among your papers at the Houghton Library. About a third of MS Box 31 contains your undergraduate papers.

ASHBERY: [laughs]

LONDRY: Are you surprised how small the selection is, or how large it is?

ASHBERY: No I'm . . . sorry that they're there. I should have destroyed them.

LONDRY: [laughs] Do you remember the Stevens paper as a piece you enjoyed writing because you were just then discovering Stevens?

ASHBERY: Yes, and the particular poem I was writing about, "Chocorua to Its Neighbor" --a kind of longish poem--I really became very fascinated by.

Of course most of the other courses I took tended to be quite academic compared to those. I enjoyed a course with Douglas Bush on the seventeenth century: I think it was on just poetry, not prose and poetry.

LONDRY: Would that have been the course for which you wrote the paper on the nature poetry of Henry Vaughan and Andrew Marvell?

ASHBERY: Yeah. Also, as I recall, I had a freshman English course with a very nice man who made freshman English bearable. He went from Harvard to teach at Smith College, and was one of the people involved in that homosexual scandal with Newton Arvin in the 50s. You probably know about that. I think he lost his job along with Newton Arvin and a couple of other people, although by that time I was no longer in touch with him.

LONDRY: Kenneth Koch speaks as if you and he were a sort of mini circle of poets back then.[44] Was it encouraging to spend time with a close friend who had the love for poetry that you had, and were you even at that time critiquing each other's work, offering editorial advice that was helpful to each other?

ASHBERY: Yes we did. We showed each other our work almost daily I think. And as I say it was sort of a unique experience for me--and I'm quite sure for him too--since at that point I hadn't known any poets. I didn't have any friends who were poets.

LONDRY: Did you make reading suggestions to each other?

ASHBERY: Yes.

LONDRY: Do you remember anything in particular, any poet Kenneth mentioned who was an author you ended up feeling quite close to?

ASHBERY: I don't offhand because we were more or less reading the same people: you know, great modern poets.... But I do think I got a lot of insight into William Carlos Williams' poetry from hearing Kenneth talk about him. Kenneth was very enthusiastic about him and I became so too.

LONDRY: The October/November 1995 issue of The Poetry Project Newsletter prints a conversation in which Kenneth Koch tells Allen Ginsberg: "I was at Harvard with John and he said to me one day that he just read Alfred Jarry, and he decided that our work should be crazier, so we took that to heart." I wondered if you remembered having said that. Also, your essay "A Reminiscence" in Homage to Frank O'Hara uses words such as "snobbish" and "cultivated blandness" to describe the artistic atmosphere at Harvard during your undergraduate days. I wondered if you were consciously trying to be crazier in your poetry, trying to be more anti-conventional, because of a sense of the oppressiveness of a sort of snobbery, elitism, or excessive conventionality of Harvard . . . . Did you have a strong urge to disrupt somehow--

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[44] John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch met each other well before either met Frank O'Hara, who began studies at Harvard in 1946 and never sat on the editorial board of The Harvard Advocate.

ASHBERY: I don't actually remember finding it so oppressive at Harvard. I was in fact glad to be in a rather literate place for a change. It was certainly a change from places where I'd previously lived. From what you quote it sounds as though I was indulging in some counter-snobbery of my own when I made those remarks. Though I probably did say to Kenneth we should make our work crazier, I really don't remember saying that or actually formulating that.

LONDRY: I guess another way of asking that kind of question is, Did you and Kenneth during your undergraduate years have a "program" or a "goal" as poets? How programmatic were your attempts at poetry at that time, if that isn't too odd a question?

ASHBERY: . . . No it's not but I really can't remember. I think my memories are not precise enough to give you an intelligent answer, but perhaps Kenneth will remember it better than I do.

LONDRY: In your B.A. honors thesis--"The Poetic Medium of W.H. Auden"--there is a phrase I was quite struck by. You are arguing for the inseparability of style and content, and write: "A poet (in our strict and holy usage of the word) with a brilliant style and no ideas is as inconceivable as a didactic poem." For the moment what interests me is the first half of the sentence, which might be taken to imply that a genuine poet sees poetry as--at least in part--a spiritual vocation. I might be reading too much into that parenthetical phrase, but I was wondering if you regarded yourself as having the "vocation" of a poet during your Harvard days, and if you conceived of it as a spiritual vocation.

ASHBERY: Well I think I certainly did regard myself as a poet then. I don't recall thinking of it as a spiritual vocation and indeed I don't remember making that statement in my essay. I wonder exactly what I meant.

LONDRY: My impression is that probably quite a few of your readers today wouldn't immediately imagine that you are a Christian and go to church regularly, as I've heard, and I'm wondering if you were religious even during your Harvard days and how that informed your poetry back then, if you think it did.

ASHBERY: Well, I remember one of the poems I published in the Advocate has a quotation from the Bible at the beginning: "Amos."

LONDRY: Yes, "A Sermon: Amos 8: 11-14."

ASHBERY: I've always been kind of religious but I don't think that it has played much of a role in my poetry though.

LONDRY: Several major poets gave readings at Harvard around the time you were there: Eliot, Stevens, and Dylan Thomas, for example. Were you able to attend any of these? Were you inspired or influenced by them?

ASHBERY: Yes, actually there was quite a memorable series of readings. I particularly liked the Auden one because he was my favorite poet at the time. I don't remember Dylan Thomas. I certainly would have gone to that, had it been while I was there, but I didn't in any case. William Carlos Williams read. Wallace Stevens read as well. I think Stevens only gave two readings in his life and that was one of them. As I recall he was wearing an overcoat which he did not remove during the reading and he spoke rather . . . he reminded me of a statue speaking. And I really thought I got something out of hearing him read, which is not true at most readings I go to. Even if I like the poetry very much I don't usually have any special feeling about hearing the author. But I did in the case of Stevens, though I'd be very hard put to tell you what it was. And Marianne Moore, also, read when I was there. And Eliot.

LONDRY: In your Auden honors thesis you seemed to downplay Eliot's importance to modern poetry and to suggest Auden as, in some sense, a more important or more relevant poet.

ASHBERY: Yes, it took me a long time to appreciate Eliot's poetry. I think I didn't until I was perhaps in my late twenties.

LONDRY: How did that shift occur?

ASHBERY: I was always wary of the kind of intellectual apparatus that accompanies his poems--the footnotes to "The Wasteland," for example--and felt I would certainly be missing important points if I hadn't read From Ritual to Romance et cetera, but at one point I changed my mind and decided that Eliot's really much more impressionistic than that, and that I could appreciate.

LONDRY: You've said that early on in your poetic career you used to revise quite extensively, but that after a while you came to revise much less. I think you gave as an example "Le Livre est sur la table," which you said went through many more drafts than you go through now. I'm wondering if anything else is different about your writing process today. Are your inspirations different? Do you write at a different time of the day?

ASHBERY: I think I used to write my poems more in the evening and now I don't do that at all. I really can't do much of anything after, say, seven o'clock, which was when I used to begin, probably. I also used to wait around for just the right soothing or inspiring combination of circumstances--or the feeling that I'd been inspired. I don't do that anymore, since I would be waiting forever.

LONDRY: [laughs]

ASHBERY: I don't know. Over the years I guess I've just got the habit of being less self-conscious about writing.

LONDRY: Thanks so much for speaking with me today.

ASHBERY: You're very welcome.

An Interview with Kenneth Koch

by Michael Londry

What follows is an edited excerpt from an interview conducted in Kenneth Koch's Columbia University office on the afternoon of March 6, 1996. In his correspondence of October 24, 1996, Professor Koch confirms the text of the interview for inclusion in this thesis.

LONDRY: Why did you choose to do your undergraduate studies at Harvard?

KOCH: I wanted to go to Harvard because I thought it was a good place for poets to go. When I was sixteen or seventeen years old I discovered modern American poetry and I also discovered the New Directions anthologies. Do you remember those big wonderful books all full of the avant-garde writing of the time? Paul Goodman, Delmore Schwartz, William Carlos Williams. A number of the poets had gone to Harvard. Delmore Schwartz, in fact, was teaching a course at Harvard, and I liked his work a lot. Wallace Stevens, as I remember, had gone to Harvard. T.S. Eliot had gone to Harvard. I forget who else. It seemed to me a place where poets went to school. And of course it had a reputation as a very good college. And so it was my first choice.

The way I got into Harvard was rather funny. I mean, I don't know really why I got into Harvard, but I went to Harvard after I got out of the army. I was drafted into the army in 1943, when I was eighteen years old. When I got out, I applied to Harvard. One of the people who recommended me for Harvard was a very, very rich man in Cincinnati, Ohio, who was a Harvard graduate, and had given a good deal of money to Harvard. My father knew him, slightly, and, I think, introduced me to him and also sent him some of the poetry I had published. While I was in the army I had published some poems. I published three poems in Poetry magazine--in February 1945. I remember it had a yellowish and brownish cover. I remember well because it was so momentous for me. I don't think it was the first time I had published in Poetry, but there were three poems of mine in this issue. One was "Poem for My Twentieth Birthday"--which is about being overseas and being a soldier and being twenty years old. Another was called "Ladies for Dinner, Saipan"--which was a kind of ironic poem about my longing for these beautiful young women who came over--I think they were part of the USO show or something--and who only went out with the officers. This is when I was on Saipan, in the Pacific. Another poem--I forget the name of it--begins "In the shoe-fixery and on the train." These were short poems and they only took up a page and a half of Poetry magazine. On the other half-page was a poem called "There's Margaret." I don't remember the name of the poet, but I remember the first line: "With hoarded lollipop and sticky dime." It was a sonnet. As I remember, it was a very conventional poem. Well, the letter this very wealthy man from Cincinnati wrote for me--which I believe helped me to get into Harvard--said "Kenneth Koch is a very precocious, excellent writer. His work has been published. I especially admired the poem 'There's Margaret.' " The poem was more recognizably poetry than my poems, but maybe wasn't as adventurous. It had this obvious, rather dopey, paradoxical first line. Anyway, that was one way I got into Harvard. There were probably others. But I was very glad to be going to Harvard because it seemed like the best place to go.

LONDRY: It also struck you as a good place after you arrived?

KOCH: Oh yeah, I liked it because I had thought of myself as a poet, more or less, since the time I was fifteen years old, but more vividly so when I was seventeen and eighteen, when I discovered modern poetry, and discovered Louis Untermeyer's anthologies of modern American and British poetry, discovered New Directions anthologies. When I was eighteen years old, I was crazy about Kenneth Patchen. Did you ever read him?

LONDRY. Yes, yes.

KOCH. I found a lot of his books at the University of Cincinnati Library. And then I also had studied a little French in school. Very haltingly, with the help of a dictionary, I translated some Baudelaire prose poems, which I didn't understand very well, but I did try translating them. I remember I also became a subscriber to View magazine. Do you know View?

LONDRY: I've heard of it.

KOCH: It was a Surrealist magazine published in the United States by André Breton. Charles Henri Ford, who was quite young then, was on it too. Some of the Surrealists came to New York, during the War, and they brought out this magazine View, to which I sent some poems. They didn't take my poems, but I got a nice letter back. The rejection slip said (I forget who signed it, maybe Charles Henri Ford): "We like your poems, but go deeper into yourself. Dream."

LONDRY: [laughs]

KOCH: [laughs] So there was this influence of Surrealism on me even at seventeen. And French poetry.

LONDRY: Did you take the advice from View to heart: Go deeper into yourself and dream?

KOCH: No, I was already dreaming, pretty much. I still had a long way to go, of course. I wrote a poem--which you can find in the archive[45]--called "For a Birthday" or "For My Eighteenth Birthday." I was big on birthday poems then. It begins "At eighteen I walk on the surface of things, tread in my stocking-feet in houses of soft love." It gets more surreal after that, but I thought the line "houses of soft love" was very surreal for me, then, in Cincinnati.

So I was a poet. I'd been reading all these poems and writing under their influence. In any case I was a poet, and before I went in the army, I had one semester at the University of Cincinnati, and I won a poetry prize there. I forget the name of it, but I won a poetry prize. Then I was a poet in the army, and a few people found out I was a poet. I remember at one point I tried to send some poems home and they were censored. I found letters all cut up. They thought I was giving secret information. I tried in vain to explain to the lieutenant that poetry doesn't really give information in that way. (I think I had mentioned the name of an island or something.)

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[45] Koch refers to "The Kenneth Koch Papers," at this time a relatively new acquisition of the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

By the time I went to Harvard I was twenty, I think, because I'd been in the army more than two years. It seemed that in Cincinnati and in the army people had thought that if I was a poet it meant that I was homosexual, that I was a communist, that I was something they didn't like. It would have been fine to be a homosexual communist--I just wasn't. My writing poetry seemed slightly suspicious to all but a few people. Some people really admired the fact that I could write poetry, but at Harvard everybody seemed to like it. As if a poet was a great thing to be at Harvard. And that was the first place I had ever been where it was sort of universally approved of. So I liked that.

LONDRY: Did the newly-passed G.I. Bill of Rights--which guaranteed four years of university education for veterans--have a play in your decision to go to Harvard? Was it a helpful financial boost?

KOCH: Oh yes, it paid my way through Harvard.

LONDRY: Could you have gone to Harvard without the G.I. Bill?

KOCH: I wish I knew. I don't know. It wasn't so expensive then as it is now. I don't really know. I don't know what my father's finances were. He probably would have found a way to do it. He was very generous with me.

LONDRY: Were you drawn to The Harvard Advocate partly because you knew that several of the prominent poets who had attended Harvard--Eliot and Stevens, for instance--had also been on the Advocate editorial board, or were you aware of that fact at all back then?

KOCH: Maybe, I don't know. I wanted to be on the Advocate because it was a famous literary magazine at Harvard University and it was the literary magazine there. I wanted to be on it. I was a poet.

LONDRY: Do you remember anything about the editorial meetings themselves? Donald Hall has mentioned that the board would stay up into the wee hours of the morning, arguing whether a certain poet's work should be included in the magazine or not. Do you remember these long arguments about pieces, or how the adjudications went at all?

KOCH: No, I don't remember long arguments about pieces. I'm not sure we had long arguments. I don't remember that very well. I remember the meetings were a lot of fun. We sat there--we were just kids, you know--we all were so "wise," and had our "taste."

I remember I was very proud because I found a wonderful story by a guy named Andy Lewis, a wonderful story about a circus or something. And I was very happy to bring that to the Advocate. I don't know what Andy is doing now. I saw him once after Harvard, about fifteen or twenty years afterwards. He was writing for television. He seemed very nostalgic for the pure literary days of the Advocate. He was a very good writer. I don't know if he's written any fiction since then or not.

LONDRY: You mentioned to me over the telephone a few days ago that there was a sponsor or a patron of the Advocate who donated enough funds to start up the Advocate again after the War, and that he specified that his donation be used on the condition there were no homosexuals, no blacks, no Jews, and no heavy drinkers on the Advocate board, yes?

KOCH: Right. That's what I heard.

LONDRY: Do you recall the name of that benefactor?

KOCH: I wonder if Tony Lewis would know. He writes for the Times. Anthony Lewis. But he wasn't on the Advocate. Tell me the names . . . . There was somebody who asked me if I would be willing to be part of some sort of court case about this, to challenge it. But I didn't want to be. I just wanted to get on with the poetry and . . . . I forget the man's name, though.

LONDRY: I have with me some xeroxes from various Advocate issues of the time. I wonder if you might see the name you're looking for there.

KOCH: Let's see. How lovely it looks . . . . "Grandma" by John Ashbery--I remember that. These are fun to look at. I remember these lines of John's: "Who expects wisdom from light-headed birds?" He's so grand when he's so young. So wise . . . . But I'm supposed to be looking for something.

LONDRY: Anything that comes to mind is fine.

KOCH: When I won the Garrison Prize, I was at Smith College with my girlfriend and John sent me a telegram: "You won the Garrison Prize. I got Honorable Mention. I think continually of those who are truly great."

LONDRY: [laughs]

KOCH: That was very sweet of him. Francis O'Hara, my, my.[46] "The twice tormented mirror of your dream." O William Butler Yeats, forgive me!

LONDRY: The piece you're quoting from--"Entr'acte for a Freak Show"-- has been anthologized quite frequently in Harvard Advocate literary anthologies: Jonathan Culler's 1966 compilation, the one titled First Flowering from 1977, and The Harvard Advocate Anniversary Anthology from 1987. They all choose the "Entr'acte" as the one piece of yours to reprint.

KOCH: I didn't let the Advocate have as much writing as my friends did. I was really stupid. Probably the best audience I would ever have was there, but I wanted to publish in Poetry magazine.

LONDRY: I was very impressed to find that you had published in at least three different issues of Poetry very early in your career, and I was also struck that I saw no Ashbery pieces there and I remembered hearing the story about how . . .

KOCH: Somebody stole his poems?

LONDRY: Yes, yes.

KOCH: No, I don't see the name.[47] He was more like an elder statesman than a literary man--the guy who wanted me to be in this lawsuit.

LONDRY: Let me return to a comment you made a few moments ago. You thought the Advocate would have been a good place for more of your poems because you thought a very good audience for your work was there. Did you mean that there were people on the editorial board itself who would have read your poems well, or did you have in mind simply the general readership of the Advocate?

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[46] Koch is looking down at a xeroxed page from an Advocate issue. Some of O'Hara's earliest Advocate pieces were published under "Francis" rather than "Frank." For the majority of his adult life, O'Hara would be "Frank."

[47] Koch continues to glance through the xeroxes from the Advocate issues.

KOCH: I think the general readership of the Advocate was as good as that of any magazine I've ever published in since. Everybody read it. All the literary people read it. If I published a poem in the Advocate, it would have been read by John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Robert Creeley, Alison Lurie, Bob Crichton. All these good writers were there who would have read it, whereas it's sort of chancy in any other magazine. However, I wanted to be in national magazines--somewhat foolishly I think. But that was a long time ago.

LONDRY: How much of a readership was there for the Advocate outside of the Harvard circle?

KOCH: I have no idea.

LONDRY: Do you think being an Advocate editor, having to read other writers' pieces with an editorial eye, helped you to get a better sense of objectivity on your own work?

KOCH: I don't think so. I don't remember reading all that much work, in fact. I don't know. As we were reading poems (I think that's what I mainly read) I would just have a feeling that I knew right away if I wanted to publish them, if they were good enough. I don't think I learned too much from that. As far as my own writing was concerned, I seemed to be on some sort of automatic pilot--as if my writing wasn't going to be changed by an experience like that. I think John and I probably influenced each other a little bit even when we were at Harvard, but Frank I didn't know when I was at Harvard. I didn't meet him until afterwards.

LONDRY: Right. But you did read his pieces in the Advocate . . .

KOCH: Yes.

LONDRY: . . . during the time he was at Harvard, though you had graduated from Harvard by the time you were reading his Advocate pieces?

KOCH: Yes.

LONDRY: How did you meet John Ashbery? I remember your speaking about how you were trying to get him on the Advocate board . . .

KOCH: Oh I met him before that. How did I meet John? We immediately became friends. I know it didn't take any time at all. It may be that I got to know him because I read one of his poems for the Advocate. The poems were so impressive--so wise and prophetic and beautiful--and I was hungry to know another poet. I didn't know any poets. I don't think I'd ever known any poets till I met John. Fate gave me a good first one. I mean that's lucky--to have the first poet you meet be a good one--because that's like first love . . . . But I'm trying to think if I knew any poets before John. I certainly didn't know any good ones. I didn't know any that had any effect on me. I must have known people who wrote poetry when I was in Cincinnati--but nobody who took it seriously. I took Delmore Schwartz's course at Harvard because I loved his work and I wanted to be in the presence of a real poet. There must have been other poets in Delmore's class. I think I started Harvard in the summer and Delmore Schwartz gave this poetry workshop in the summer term. I don't know whether I remember the poets in that class, though.

LONDRY: I could list a few writers who were students at Harvard at the time, in case this rings any bells. These aren't all poets, though. Donald Hall, and John Hawkes, for instance . . .

KOCH: I met John Hawkes at Harvard but he wasn't in that class. Donald Hall I never met, but we printed a poem of his in the Advocate.

LONDRY: Harold Brodkey?

KOCH: No I didn't know Harold there. Frank did.

LONDRY: Robert Bly . . .

KOCH: He was there afterwards.

LONDRY: Lawrence Osgood . . .

KOCH: Larry Osgood, that was a friend of John's and Frank's yeah. I vaguely knew him. Did he write poetry?

LONDRY: I recall seeing at least one poem and one story of his in the Advocate. George Montgomery also has a couple . . .

KOCH: Oh yeah, I knew George.

LONDRY: Adrienne Rich was probably a little bit after you.

KOCH: No, I didn't know her.

LONDRY: Robert Creeley?

KOCH: I knew Creeley, sure.

LONDRY: Was he in any classes with you or . . .

KOCH: Was he taking classes or was he just a presence there? I know that he was at Cronin's a lot--Jim Cronin's bar, where we went in the evening--and he always wore an eye patch. He was a very bohemian figure because he had this eye patch and he had, I think, a pregnant wife, who wore a red dress, and he had a big dog. He was very impressive walking around Cambridge. Yeah, I knew Creeley. I didn't know him very well.

LONDRY: Did you talk about poetry with Creeley?

KOCH: He was a good friend of Sam Lawrence, Seymour Lawrence. Creeley and I didn't speak about poetry that I remember. He was in sort of a different gang. My gang was John Ashbery, as far as poetry was concerned, and then I was friends with Andy Lewis and a guy named Bob Bingham and . . . Who did I go to Cronin's with? John didn't go to Cronin's much, I don't think. Once I got John to go to a bowling alley with me and I turned around after I went to find a ball and John had disappeared. That was how. . . . He just couldn't stand the atmosphere there. We knew Barbara Epstein, whose name was then Barbara Zimmerman, but was known as Bubsy Zimmerman. She's the editor of the New York Review of Books. She was a friend, a Radcliffe student. Alison Lurie we knew. Peter Grey was a good friend of mine.

LONDRY: Yes, you have a poem about him in the Garrison Prize MS, which is at the Harvard Archives: "Letter to Peter Grey."

KOCH: Do you have a copy of that poem?

LONDRY: Yes. Are you surprised? Harvard Archives has a copy of your Garrison Prize MS.

KOCH: Was this the year I won?[48]

LONDRY: I think it must have been.

KOCH: Did I win the prize for all of these pieces or just for "Entr'acte"?

LONDRY: I'd love to know. I wish you could tell me. I imagined that the Garrison Prize adjudicators looked over the whole manuscript and made their decision based on the whole, but I don't know for sure. But it is true that the only poem that was published in the Advocate--on the occasion of your winning the prize--was "Entr'acte for a Freak Show."

KOCH: Could I make a copy of this?

LONDRY: Sure.

KOCH: So you don't know what I won it for?

LONDRY: I can't be sure. I was hoping you might have some impressions yourself of how the adjudications worked, and of who the judges usually were--if they were Harvard professors or adjudicators from outside the faculty . . .

KOCH: No, I don't know. This'll be very entertaining for me.[49]

LONDRY: "Letter to Peter Grey" should be in there.

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[48] The MS was submitted "for the GARRISON PRIZE | Harvard College | 1947-48" (title page), and is recorded as having been "deposited by Kenneth Koch" at the Harvard University Archives on "5 May 1948." The full title of the MS reads "A Letter, Three Poems, and a Selection from a Play" (Harvard Archives reference number: HU 89.185.99). The poem "Entr'acte for a Freak Show" was published in the Commencement (Spring) issue of 1948, with the heading "Lloyd McKim Garrison Prize." John Ashbery's poem "Song from a Play" is published in the same issue under the heading "Garrison Competition, Honorable Mention."

[49] Koch looks at the MS.

KOCH: I was so earnest in that poem. It was my first work in blank verse. Nancy was my girlfriend. Stewart Kirby was a guy that we knew. Peggy was a girl we knew in New York . . . a dancer . . . Peggy Connolly.

LONDRY: Would you travel to New York from Harvard for the weekend or holidays?

KOCH: Sometimes. My goodness. Who would have thought? [laughs, looking through the MS] What strange works I wrote. Oh well. Yes, more questions.

LONDRY: We talked a little bit about meeting Ashbery. It's striking for me to hear from you and from Ashbery how much each of you were glad to meet the other, how much each of you appreciated having a colleague, a friend in poetry.

KOCH: Oh, it was wonderful, yeah.

LONDRY: Did Ashbery recommend you read any authors you hadn't read before, any authors who would eventually influence you? Ashbery mentioned that he thinks your discussions with him about William Carlos Williams helped him to come to a better appreciation of William Carlos Williams' work.

KOCH: John suggested a lot of people for me to read. I remember one very influential recommendation was . . . . He said to me one day, "Kenneth, I think our work should be more crazy." And then he told me that he'd gotten this idea from reading Alfred Jarry--Ubu Roi and other things. So I read Jarry and I agreed with John that our work should be crazier. But he was full of books for me to read. Lots of novels, too. I think he suggested I read E.M. Forester. It's so hard to remember what books John told me to read, but he's always been a great source of books and also movies. I took him very seriously about movies. He's hardly ever wrong about movies. I don't think he's ever wrong about movies. If John likes a movie, there's something in it that's worth seeing. But I'm trying to think about books. The most important author I recommended to John was Raymond Roussel, as he probably told you, because when I was in Paris I sent him a book by Roussel and John got very interested in Roussel, translated him, and wrote about him.

LONDRY: Ashbery hadn't read any Roussel before you recommended him?

KOCH: No, I don't think so. I've always been grateful to John for books and movies. Oh, also Proust. John told me I had to read Proust.

LONDRY: Yes, Ashbery wrote an interesting undergraduate paper on Proust that's in the Houghton Library: "The Prevalence of Odette." May I get back to Alfred Jarry and craziness for a moment? Were you interested in being crazier because you were simply attracted to Jarry's craziness or was it partly because you felt there was an excess of conventionality at Harvard, or in the literary scene at the time? In other words, why exactly do you think you and Ashbery felt at this time the urge to be crazier in your work?

KOCH: I felt less conventionality at Harvard than I had in the army or in Cincinnati. No, it didn't have anything to do with the atmosphere at Harvard. I was just . . . attracted to it. I was immediately attracted to Surrealism. I told you at seventeen, before I went to Harvard, I was a subscriber to View. I used to get copies of View magazine when I was at Western Pacific Base Command Headquarters on Saipan. This magazine would come once a month. It made me so happy! No, I just loved Surrealism immediately. The whole idea that you could be crazy . . . . You know there I was: seventeen, eighteen years old, filled with lust and desires to be a great poet, filled with all these crazy desires that didn't correspond to the life around me at all, but here it was in this poetry. And painting, too. I loved modern painting rather early on. I remember I won some sort of prize in high school and I could choose any book I wanted. I chose a book about modern art; I loved the reproductions. I immediately liked things by Max Ernst and Picasso's surrealist things and all that. So I don't think it had anything to do with Harvard. I think John had the same experience--that he was immediately attracted to things that were crazy. It's true that the poetry scene then was very conventional. All of the really established poets were the ones who came after all those great inventive people--like Pound and Williams and Stevens--and they were all publishing in the quarterlies sort of ironic poems and intellectual poems and that was very dull, but it wasn't mainly a reaction against that that I wrote. It was just out of pleasure.

LONDRY: Did you and Ashbery read the New Critics? Did you have any impression of or response to their writings?

KOCH: I had trouble understanding what they were talking about. I remember I felt dumb when I read R.P. Blackmur particularly. His sentences seemed very murky to me, like streams that were blocked by stones and frogs. I thought he had some very good perceptions about, for instance, Stevens's strange language, but really I didn't enjoy that criticism much. But there it was. It's one thing for me to be sort of a revolutionary avant-garde writer, which I sort of felt myself to be--after a while, after I was in New York for a while and was friends with the painters and with John and Frank and was writing a lot--but during the time I was at Harvard I was just a baby poet and whatever was established had a kind of glamor. So the New Criticism had this kind of glamor, sort of unavoidably (the way theory does for some poor students now). You know, light was shining off it. So I tried. I never got much out of it, though. I read Empson. Empson was sort of interesting. Reading Seven Types of Ambiguity was a bit like reading poetry, but it didn't seem to be exactly about the main thing. No, I don't think it meant very much to me. I just knew it was there and it excited me because it seemed to be one of the golden steps I'd have to get on to get to glory (whatever that was); I'd have to go through New Criticism in some way; I'd have to get those guys to like me. I never did get them to like me, I don't think.

LONDRY: So there was no antipathy towards the New Critical attitude? You weren't specifically trying to speak against or trying to write poems that were not appreciable by the New Critics . . .

KOCH: No, no, I never would have thought of that. I think John caught the last gasps of approval from some of them. He got approved by the establishment quite early, so I think he might even have won some of them over before they stopped writing. But I didn't, and anyway by the time I wrote Fresh Air and Ko I certainly knew that I didn't like that stuff, that it was going in the wrong direction.

LONDRY: Many of the poems you published in The Harvard Advocate, as well as the pieces in your Garrison Prize MS, seem to me to have a strikingly grave tone, as well as often very strong, regular rhythms--at least compared to much of the work you did after graduating from Harvard, which frequently has a decidedly comic tone, and much looser, more conversational rhythms. If you agree at all with that assessment, do you have a sense of how that shift occurred?

KOCH: Probably. It was when I was at Harvard that I first read Yeats. I remember I took the writing course with Delmore Schwartz and he said, "You should read Yeats." I hadn't really thought much about reading Yeats before that. So the tone of these poems is very Yeatsian indeed. Particularly "Little Red Riding Hood: A Play for Dancers" is like one of Yeats's plays: "Yes, I seem to recognize the place / As though its weather were indelible / And formal in my mind." Verse forms always came very easy to me. I remember when I was at Harvard I took Werner Jaeger's course in Greek civilization called Paideia, and I took my notes in blank verse. I used to be able to speak in blank verse--to at first the delight and then the horror of my friends. It was hard to get me to stop. But . . . "New York is our seduction: we go back / As to the wriggling housemaid in a dream" . . . oh my God, that's very Yeatsian stuff. I passed through it like you get through an obstacle course or something. Then what happened? Let's see. After I graduated from Harvard I came to New York and not much happened to loosen my verse up the first couple of years in New York, but then I went to France. That changed a lot. French poetry. Reading Max Jacob, and Apollinaire. I read everybody.

LONDRY: You hadn't read those poets earlier in View ?

KOCH: They weren't Surrealists. View was very Surrealist.

LONDRY: Ah, it was very strictly Surrealist . . . .

KOCH: The thing is that my French got very good when I was in France. I got to speak French very well. I remember two poems that I wrote in France, the two earliest poems in Thank You. I didn't really much esteem the things I wrote before I was in France. That was 1950; I was twenty-five. And the first two poems I wrote that I liked enough to put in my book were "On the Great Atlantic Rainway"--which is kind of influenced by Yeats's poem "Ego Dominus Tuus," with his two characters talking to each other about intellectual subjects--and the second poem, "The Bricks," which begins:

> The bricks in a wall
> Sang this song
> "We shall not fall
> The whole day long
> But white and small
> Lie in abandon."

I wrote a lot of other things then when I was back in Paris, but I don't think any of them were very good. When I first got to France I knew French but I didn't really know it, so I'd hear an ordinary sentence like "Elle se tient debout contre le mur blanc" and I knew that "mur blanc" meant "white wall," but "mur" also meant "ripe" and "mature"; and "blanc" also suggested "blank" to me; and "debout" had a funny sound; and "elle" was sexier than "she." And it was all like hearing lots of snow flurries, hearing a lot of nuances, of colors and sounds, when I would read just an ordinary French sentence. And after a while I tried writing this way too. That was after I came back. Let's see. After I was in France, then I went to Berkeley for a year. I was a teaching assistant. And there I wrote a long translation of a Raymond Roussel poem--but that was in fourteeners[50]--and then I wrote some poems that were much freer there. Oh I know what happened, I left out something. When I got back from the army, when I was in Cincinnati, before I went to Harvard, I got overwhelmed by William Carlos Williams and I wrote a lot of poems in rather free verse.

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[50] **Fourteener**. "An English meter of seven iambic feet [which] flourished in the narrative poetry of the Elizabethans, who coined for it the term *fourteener*" because of the fourteen-syllable line. Notable later uses are Wordsworth's *The Norman Boy*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Cowper's Grave*, and Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms, ed. Alex Preminger, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1986).

But they didn't have much of an afterlife. They're around somewhere in the library.[51] But when I was at Harvard it was the Yeatsian tone that dominated. But when I was back in New York in 1950--or 1951 maybe--I wrote "When the Sun Tries to Go On." Do you know that poem?

LONDRY: Oh Yes.

KOCH: That's completely wild. That was influenced by French poetry, by my not understanding and understanding at the same time and being able to enjoy it. It was very influenced by reading War and Peace . . . and Anna Karenina just because Tolstoy seemed to include everything. And then I wrote this whole bunch of poems in the style of "When The Sun Tries to Go On"--which I'd love to publish as a book, but I haven't found anybody who wants to do it yet.

LONDRY: Are some of those poems in that little chapbook published by Black Sparrow Press?

KOCH: Yes, Poems from 1952 and 1953. I wrote that way for a couple of years. And after that I could sort of write in all different ways. Yeats was gone. Not that he was an evil presence in my poetry, it's just that when I look at these poems I realize how influenced I was by that kind of writing. Another big influence on me--when I first came back to New York--was Wallace Stevens. I was crazy about Stevens. Very influenced by Stevens is the poem in On the Great Atlantic Rainway called "Summery Weather." I forget how it goes. "And that night we raining" or something like that. His poetry was an influence for quite a while. I'm a poet who likes to be influenced. I'm always trying to find new ways to write. I like everything I write to be different from everything else, which is rather hard. It's not that I like it to be that way. I'm just usually not satisfied with it unless it is.

LONDRY: It strikes me at times that there's some sort of prejudice against creative writers who "accept" influences and deliberately take other authors' works as models to start with.

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[51] Koch refers to his Papers at the Berg Collection, NYPL.

But in the visual arts for hundreds of years there's been a tradition of early on going to the museum to copy the Great Masters--in order to learn technique, understand composition, expand one's sense of the art--and then you move on from those influences. How many musicians have you ever heard say, "I don't listen to music--except my own songs--because I don't want to be influenced"? It's unheard of. I'm wondering if a certain kind of fear of influence is quite specific to the literary arts. Often, at least with beginning students in poetry, I hear a phrase such as "I try not to read too much work of other poets because I don't want to be influenced"--and somehow this always surprises me.

KOCH: That's exactly what I said to Delmore Schwartz. This is in 1946. Delmore Schwartz said, "Have you read Stevens?" And I said, "Yes, but I stopped." He said, "Why did you stop?" I said, "Because I didn't want to be influenced too much." He looked at me and he stopped and said, "How could you be too influenced by Wallace Stevens?" So I read Stevens again. Young poets, I guess, often have an idea (I did) that one's particular genius is something that can't be touched by anything else. I think one grows out of that idea.

LONDRY: Were you also influenced to move away from the rather grave tones and the more regular rhythms to a more comic and a more conversational style by having read Frank O'Hara's poems in the early 1950s?

KOCH: I remember feeling a new freedom to do certain things when I read Frank's poems --when I read his poem "Easter," for instance. That was very inspiring. And I remember trying to do some of the things that Frank did, like writing a poem and somebody walks into the room and talks to you and you put what they say in the poem instead of getting irritated and stopping. Yes, there was a while when I wrote a little bit under the influence of Frank, and I think that John and Frank and I all influenced each other in a probably un-sort-out-able way. I mean, we encouraged each other. We were so happy to be with each other. At least I was. It turned out that each of our poetry turned out to be rather different, but I know I got a lot out of their poetry. I never read anything by either of them that was boring in those early days. That's the main thing. I was always fascinated to read what they wrote. It was primary stuff. It was really good and nobody else's poetry affected me that way. I was sure I could tell if something was written by John or Frank and that's the only kind of poetry that I really . . . . Well, I felt equally inspired by certain French poets, I suppose, and by Williams and Stevens, but as far as the absolute thing that was closest to me, the thing that I felt was closest to me--it was John's and Frank's poetry.

LONDRY: You mentioned you were inspired by Frank's poem "Easter." May I ask if you were inspired by "Easter" to do anything in particular? Perhaps that's a nasty question for me to ask.

KOCH: No, it's not. I don't remember. . . . Frank did things in that poem that I didn't think I could ever do: something about "sisters in a hanky of shade," and "the glassy towns are fucked by yaks." There are certain remarkable things in that poem. But there was one thing that I think inspired me--but I don't know if it was in my poetry before or not, though I don't remember its being there. At a certain point in the poem Frank writes: "the roses of Pennsylvania." To put something recognizably poetical (roses) with something recognizably unpoetical (Pennsylvania)--that seemed wonderful. I think I got something out of that. I got some other things out of Frank's early poems: I think I started using more exclamation marks, and I also talked about little things--as in his wonderful poem "Today" which has kangaroos, sequins, etc. When I was in France, I noticed a number of aspirin tablets appearing in my poems, small things.

LONDRY: At one point Frank O'Hara said that he used to be able to write only when depressed but later in life could write only when happy. And apparently John Ashbery used often to write in the evenings, but now usually writes earlier in the day. Has your writing process, how you get inspired to write or the time of day in which you write, has anything like that changed between the Harvard period and the present?

KOCH: The Harvard period. It's hard to remember what time of day I wrote then. It seems to me always my favorite time to write is right after breakfast, after I've drunk a good deal of coffee and I'm full of hope and I can be all alone and it's quiet and there's sunlight. That's a very good time for me to write. Sometimes I write at other times, but that's my favorite time.

LONDRY: Do you always have to be inspired when you write (whatever your understanding of the word "inspired" is)?

KOCH: I don't have to be inspired to sit down. Unless something helps me out while I'm sitting there I don't write very well. But sometimes I only get inspired by writing. No, the the muse doesn't visit me every day.

LONDRY: But at times you will just sit down, start to write, and see what happens?

KOCH: Oh, yeah. A lot of times.

LONDRY: Were you influenced by any of your instructors? You mentioned Delmore Schwartz. I have a list of a few others instructors who, I believe, taught at Harvard around the time you were there. I could run some of these names past you.

KOCH: Delmore inspired me because he liked my work and because I admired his work a lot. Theodore Morrison was the other writing teacher I had. He thought my poetry was accomplished, but I don't know how much he liked it. I don't remember. He was a very nice man, though. I liked Clyde Kluckhohn, who taught Cultural Anthropology. I took a wonderful course in Japanese and Chinese Art, which I liked, but I don't remember the name of the man who taught it. I liked the man who taught Plato. I don't remember being really inspired by any of my teachers. Oh, I liked F.O. Matthiessen--who gave a good course. But I don't remember ever being particularly inspired by my teachers to write.

LONDRY: Did you know John Ciardi?

KOCH: John Ciardi? Yes, I knew John Ciardi slightly.

LONDRY: At Harvard or . . .

KOCH: Yeah, I think he was in the Society of Fellows or something. He was a member of the Signet.[52]

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[52] A Harvard literary society.

LONDRY: Albert Guerard?

KOCH: No, I didn't know him. I didn't take a course with him. I think he taught a writing course after I'd stopped taking writing courses.

LONDRY: Ashbery mentioned he took a course with Theodore Spencer that he quite liked.

KOCH: Theodore Spencer, yes. I remember I went to see Delmore Schwartz in his office once and he introduced me to Theodore Spencer and I felt very . . . glamorized. Delmore said, "Ted, this is Kenneth Koch. He's a good poet." I was very happy with that. That's all I remember.

LONDRY: Douglas Bush also taught around that time at Harvard.

KOCH: He taught the eighteenth century?

LONDRY: I think Ashbery did a seventeenth-century poetry course with him.

KOCH: I didn't take a course with him.

LONDRY: There were poetry readings at Harvard by some very well-known poets around the time that you, Ashbery, and O'Hara were there--by Eliot, for instance, and by Wallace Stevens. Did you attend any of these, and, if so, were you inspired or influenced by them?

KOCH: No, I don't think I got to either one of them, for some reason. I'm pretty sure I missed the Stevens and I think I missed the Eliot too. I was sorry that I missed them. But I don't know why I did. I mean, undergraduate life was so crazy, I don't know why . . . I don't know what I was doing. I wasn't doing what was good for me when I missed those readings, though.

LONDRY: This may have been after you graduated, but The Harvard Advocate would sometimes host a cocktail party for a poet who was reading.

KOCH: They had parties for writers, yes. I remember they had a party for Auden. And I remember they had a party for Stephen Spender, too, I think. And they also had a party for Aldous Huxley. Huxley was in England at the time, but they had the party anyway!

LONDRY: [laughs]

KOCH: Yeah, I think it was funny.

LONDRY: They'd asked him to come but . . .

KOCH: I don't even know if they'd asked him. They just had a party. I think that was it. But I remember being at the party with Auden. I remember being very shy and I was dying to ask Auden a question, to talk to him. I couldn't think of anything to ask him, and I got drunker and drunker, and I guess so did he. Finally toward the end of the evening I said, "Mr Auden, could I ask you a question?" He said, "Yes, yes, of course." And I said, "I've been trying to write verse plays and I don't find the iambic pentameter line satisfactory" [laughs]. He said, "Try syllabic verse." And that was the end of that.

Has John told you the story about when we were in the café at Harvard? We were in some café near Harvard Square playing a pinball machine one day--we liked to play pinball--and Auden came in and sat down and had a cup of coffee and maybe a sandwich and left. After he left John said, "He didn't even notice us." And I said, "John, we're unknown undergraduates, why would W.H. Auden notice us?" And John said, "Well, you'd think he would have known!" [laughs loudly]

LONDRY: [laughs] As if Auden had some kind of radar for talented young poets!

KOCH: I thought that was very, very funny. We did both get to know him afterwards, but he didn't notice us then. These two babies playing pinball machines--how could he notice us?

LONDRY: Did you attend the reading that Auden gave before the party, if he did give a reading before the party?

KOCH: I think I was at whatever Auden did, but I don't remember anything specific about that one. I also remember Stephen Spender, whom I thought was so glamorous. I was very impressed by Stephen Spender because he's somebody who got to me when I was seventeen or eighteen: lines like "more beautiful and soft than any moth." He just seemed . . . . He was up there in Poetry Heaven. So I remember I saw him walking around the streets of Cambridge. He was very tall and I followed him for a couple of blocks thinking that maybe I'd get a chance to ask him some idiotic question, but I didn't.

LONDRY: Thanks so much for chatting with me today.

KOCH: It was fun.